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# Stories worth telling: How one school navigates tensions between innovation and standards

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STORIES WORTH TELLING: HOW ONE SCHOOL NAVIGATES  
TENSIONS BETWEEN INNOVATION AND STANDARDS

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Education

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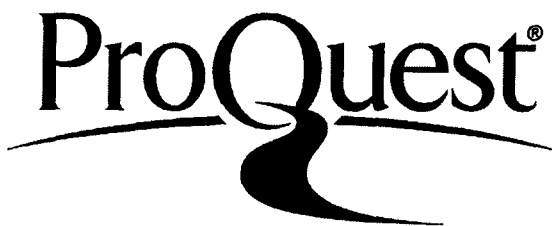
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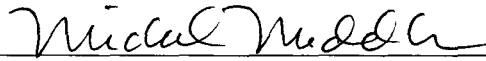
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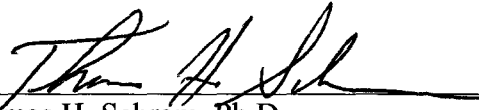
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## DEDICATION

*To my mother:*

For instilling in me the democratic ideal of ‘equality of opportunity’. My passion for education was inspired by her life-long work on behalf of women and children.

*To my father:*

For role-modeling the pursuit of knowledge and the joys of research.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance, support and kindness of numerous people. The ideas and lifework of many people shaped my direction and thinking throughout the entirety of my dissertation and will no doubt contribute to my ongoing research interests.

Each of my committee members shaped, in their own ways, the trajectory of my work. Tom Van Winkle, of Expeditionary Learning, provided a needed grounding in how my research applied to schools. His lens offered a necessary push toward making my work make sense to teachers and to people who work with teachers. Having him get excited about my emerging theory about ‘making student work public’ helped catalyze my own beliefs about the implications of my work.

The three doctoral classes I took with Barbara Houston deeply influenced my scholarly intellect and my ability to consider myself worthy of making claims about education. The long hours of paper writing and in-class discussions, as well as her insightful (i.e., probing-to-the-quick) comments stuck with me as I built arguments, made conceptual claims, and turned my research into practical visions. Specifically, her comments in the proposal stage of my dissertation helped me to clarify the ways I conceptualized and examined assessment.

Tom Schram’s methodological guidance was critical at key points in the proposal phase and in the challenging task of writing about my research methodology (a methodology that spanned the finer-grained details of student-group audio recordings to

attempts to capture school-wide practices). From Tom, insights on seemingly small things always led to the substantial improvement of the bigger picture.

From Mike Middleton I gained real-world relevance, both in the sense of application to other researchers and to the everyday life of schools. His in-depth knowledge and passion for schooling helped shape how I conceived of my research, particularly how I considered student engagement and motivation. Additionally, the many hours I spent with my co-chairs, Mike and Jayson Seaman, in our joint project examining motivation from a sociocultural perspective, was invaluable to being able to tease out the threads that I pursued throughout my dissertation.

Finally, Jayson, who has stuck with me since *before* I entered the program, has been a constant source of support and direction. I have received countless hours of consultation from Jayson on *what* I am studying, *how* I am studying it, and *what* I am learning (i.e., the contributions I make). Without his musings on my work, which often overlapped with his own questions and interests, I can truthfully say that the substance and quality of my work would not be the same.

In addition to committee members, there were several people who steered the direction of my work. First, my research emerged out of my Graduate Assistantship with Expeditionary Learning. The days I spent with Ron Berger, Chief Programs Officer of Expeditionary Learning, hunched over examples of student work from around the country, launched my interest in both student work and in King Middle School. His passion for high-quality student work and his unwavering belief in students' capacities to produce beautiful things was inspiring. As I was tasked with writing short descriptions of several

hundred pieces of work, I had the opportunity to “think like Ron” and hone my own analysis of student work.

I will also be forever grateful to the staff and students of King Middle School. From the first time I contacted people at King in the fall of 2009, I was graciously welcomed into the school. Specifically, I thank David Grant for his time, insightful thoughts, directness and witty humor - for someone in a public school to allow an outsider to ‘tag along’ through nearly all moments of their work day, over 25 days, was quite special. To do research alongside Dave was a gift for which I am extremely grateful.

Caitlin LeClair, 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teacher, also was very willing to share her expertise with me. I am grateful for her skillful teaching, her poise while assuming multiple roles (i.e., classroom teacher, host of visitors, and public speaker), and her insights into her own teaching. Through our continued work, Caitlin and I have made several conference presentations and co-written a journal article; I am proud that my research at King turned into collaborative efforts with Caitlin.

Additionally, I am grateful to all the students of “B-Block.” In particular, I acknowledge Michael for his willingness to be captured on video and audio and talk with me at length about school. To witness Michael’s developmental moments of recognition through Small Acts of Courage continues to touch me deeply.

I will also be forever proud of the four students who went to Portland, Oregon, to deliver the keynote address in front of 800 educators. It was truly inspiring to be part of their preparation process and I still get teary eyed when I think back on their speech. Watching their process of ‘standing a head taller’ in and around their performance was remarkable.

I also want to acknowledge the Graduate School of the University of New Hampshire for awarding me a Dissertation Year Fellowship. This funding allowed me to concentrate on collecting and analyzing data and writing my final product.

My friends, family and fellow students also propelled me toward the finish line. My talented friend, Debi, helped me create the diagram of my emergent theory. Her ability to morph my thinking into a graphic representation was amazing. Robin Ellwood, fellow doctoral student, read and commented on multiple drafts of my dissertation, in various stages of completion.

My grandmother, Harriet Lange Rheingold, who died in 1999, was a developmental psychologist at the University of North Carolina. She was a daunting, yet supportive figure in my life and academic pursuits. I am endlessly curious about what her thoughts would be about sociocultural perspectives on learning and development. Also, my father and mother have been sources of unwavering support throughout my professional and academic career.

Finally, and I am not overstating myself here, my dissertation would not have been possible without the loving support of my partner, Tara Flippo. Her willingness to cheer me on, through all stages of my doctoral program, was essential to the successful completion of my dissertation. Thank you, Tara.

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## ABSTRACT

### STORIES WORTH TELLING: HOW ONE SCHOOL NAVIGATES TENSIONS BETWEEN INNOVATION AND STANDARDS

by

Alison Rheingold

University of New Hampshire, December, 2011

This dissertation examines the cultural practice of assessment at King Middle School, a grades 6-8 school in Portland, Maine. I trace this school's reform efforts over 23 years, within the current development of school-wide practices over time, in relation to making work public.

I used a sociocultural framework, which allowed for an examination of the situation-as-a-whole, to see learning as distributed among people, time and objects, and to view artifacts of student work as *boundary objects*—sites of negotiation among people from different, but related, social worlds. A sociocultural perspective also allowed for an expansive notion of assessment that included not just individual classroom strategies or school-wide practices, but also the system of assessment across communities.

I adopted a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. My research yielded a mid-level theory about how sharing work with audiences—and the resulting recognition—shapes students, teachers, institutions and communities. Accordingly, this theory also describes a dialectic process—how institutions, communities, teachers and students shape the cultural practice of assessment. In line with a sociocultural perspective, I also found that recognition was not simply something *produced* through student work, but was an *inherent* feature of the activity.

In conclusion, I share implications on three levels: conceptual, methodological and practical. Conceptually, I offer a *developmental* understanding of recognition in which recognition can be seen as a rich site of acknowledgement for contributions to, and membership in, communities. My practical findings include recommendations for policy, schools and classrooms such as: (1) Allowing multiple types of evidence to ‘count’ as measures of academic achievement; (2) intentionally perforating the traditional boundaries of school; (3) creating opportunities for students to engage in reciprocal caring; and (4) seeing assessment as integral to, rather than separate from, learning.

## SECTION ONE

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*As the four middle school students approach the microphone for the first time, a palpable sense of confidence and pride exudes from each of them. They have been preparing for months and have experienced many moments of excitement, nervousness and fear. However, now they are ready for their task: delivering a 30-minute, multi-media keynote address in front of 800 people at the 2011 national Expeditionary Learning conference in Portland, Oregon. Each student has their lines memorized; their well-coordinated presentation includes taking turns speaking, documentary videos, recorded music and still photographs.*

*Since arriving in Portland, the students have practiced multiple times: in their hotel room, in a small conference room and up on stage in the cavernous ballroom. Each time they run through their lines, they imagine a huge roomful of educators eager to hear their words.*

*From the moment they were asked to deliver the keynote, these four students and their teachers have worked tirelessly to craft an excellent presentation. For all of them, their hearts and souls are on display – not just their academic work on the Civil Rights Movement, but the school that they are so proud of.*

*They deliver a flawless speech and at the end they are treated to a rousing standing ovation from the audience of educators. People in the audience are in awe of these 8<sup>th</sup> graders – their poise and words defy typical notions of what middle schools are capable of. The head of Expeditionary Learning echos the thoughts of audience members when he says at the end of their presentation, visibly moved by the students' performance, "I'll say only this - your stories and the way you tell them, represent the best of EL. I have hope for a world that has the four of you in it."*

This opening vignette describes the extraordinary recognition that befell four students and their teachers from King Middle School, a grades 6-8 public school in Portland, Maine, for their work on a project about the Civil Rights Movement called Small Acts of Courage. These 13- and 14-year olds performed on a national stage, showcasing themselves, their academic work, their teachers and their school.

Given the above story, consider the following additional information about King

Middle School:

- (1) In a typical year, the school puts on 12 Culminating Events, the final performances of students' multi-month, community-based, interdisciplinary investigations. Culminating Events are presented in the school's auditorium to invited guests and out in the community to the general public.
- (2) Near the end of each school year, King hosts a Celebration of Learning at the city's Expo Center where students showcase their work from throughout the year to hundreds of people from the community.
- (3) During the 2010-2011 academic year, King hosted over 200 visitors who came from far and near to glimpse the school's systematic and long-standing reforms that engage heterogeneous groups of students in rigorous academics.
- (4) The school's website showcases students-in-action, featuring student-made documentary movies, student-written blogs, and culminating products from recent projects as well as archived work since 2000.
- (5) The schools' population has become increasingly diverse over the last 20 years—King is now the most diverse middle school in Maine. Among the 535 students in 2010-2011, 36 percent were foreign born, 21 percent's first language was not English, and 57 percent were eligible for free and reduced lunch.

At King, the norm is to publicly perform and display student work. Although student achievement and school quality is also evaluated through standardized test scores—and this school does well on these accountability measures—King purposefully showcases products and performances of students' academic work, work that often demonstrates meaningful contributions to the local community.

At many schools in the United States, however, the publicized markers of growth and achievement are more often *only* test scores, letter-graded report cards, and dropout percentages. Aggregated scores by grade level, subject, race, gender, level of English proficiency and special education status are publicly distributed and used by the district,

state and federal system to ‘hold schools accountable’ and positive growth is heralded as a sign that the achievement gap is closing.

The following example illustrates this point. President Obama, in March 2011, gave a speech at Miami Central High School, in Miami, Florida, during which he highlighted his education agenda (March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011). Obama chose MCHS because of the school’s recent and dramatic improvement on federally mandated, and hence sought after, indicators of school quality, marked by rising test scores and graduation rates for students from low-income backgrounds and students of color<sup>1</sup>. Although having Obama at their school, touting their accomplishments, certainly engendered pride and recognition of students, teachers and the local community, the students’ achievement in this example is less tangible than that of schools like King—the stories of learning and student engagement at MCHS are aggregated, quantitative ones removed from everyday teaching and learning. In the current era of standards and accountability, MCHS is a *best-case* scenario. More often schools and teachers are publicly vilified for *not* raising test scores or for *not* lowering drop out rates, rather than for significant improvements, which sets up an antagonistic relationship between schools and communities.

The two opening scenarios cut to the heart of my argument. My research is situated in the dilemmas that arise when innovative reforms are implemented in the current standards and accountability climate. At King Middle School, students participate in collaborative academic work while making tangible contributions to their local community; students publicly perform their work; and students, teachers, and the *school-as-a-whole* are acknowledged for their accomplishments. These features of King entwine

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<sup>1</sup>Diane Ravitch, in a New York Times Op-Ed piece from May, 2011, used MCHS and Obama’s exultations of this school—as an “example of inflated success.” She critiqued the presented test scores and graduation rates, saying that though they had improved, the scores still were near the bottom for all of Florida. The

the worth of what students produce, with people who have a stake in students' achievement, along with how students and teachers gain recognition for their work. These processes are substantially different from the nationally driven notion of what counts as progress, which emphasizes quantitative comparisons of schools and groups of students via standardized test scores. How does a school like King manage the contradictions between the two types of evidence? How to simultaneously attend to both forms? Given that the criteria used to evaluate schools—and respectively teaching and learning—has narrowed to a nearly singular focus on standardized test scores, how is it possible for a school or a community to consider and accept alternative measures of academic success?

The above questions can also be expanded to include the connections among school-change efforts, assessment systems, and individual student achievement. Here I broaden assessment to encompass more than the evaluation of a student's academic achievement, more than a specific practice or strategy used within a classroom, and more than the evaluation of school quality. I am talking about *all* of the above, where assessment is viewed as a systemic *process*, undertaken by people within and across communities, toward common, and/or sometimes competing, ends. Here the contrast between practices that emphasize evaluation of products and performances of student work in addition to tests—instead of *only* the current system of accountability and standards that fosters a 'measure and punish'<sup>2</sup> climate—can be elevated to the level of interacting systems, can be examined and thus better understood.

Two major tensions emerge. First, when in-depth, multi-month explorations are prioritized over more specific topic-based content as pre-cursors to test readiness, clashes

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 6 in Diane Ravitch's (2010) book, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System*, is titled, "NCLB – Measure and Punish." The uproar in Atlanta, Georgia, in the fall of 2011 over wide-spread cheating on state tests is an example of Ravitch's predicted consequences.



arise between what counts as progress, how best to engage students, and what constitutes meaningful learning. Thus, in schools that strive to meet the needs of historically under-resourced students these aims are unfairly opposed: (1) How to engage students who are underserved by public schools (i.e., students who live in poverty, students whose first language is not English, and students of color); and (2) how to raise standardized test scores enough to make Adequate Yearly Progress? Some would argue that both are the aims of the federal education legislation passed in 2001 known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). However, many researchers show that NCLB accountability measures intended to close the achievement gap have only worsened access to teaching and learning for those in greatest need of quality educational opportunities (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2007) and thus far have not produced substantial test-score gains. NCLB requirements have diminished, rather than improved, students' opportunity to learn.

The second specific tension within my larger argument is *how* student work is positioned within the community to: (1) Foster congenial relationships among school personnel, families and community members; and (2) establish collaborative, rather than antagonistic efforts among students, teachers and the community. In schools that strive to implement school-wide reform, this positioning of student work creates the means for people outside and inside the school to communicate in ways that foster collaboration instead of competition and misunderstanding.

Here is what's at stake at King Middle School in both of these specific tensions: engaging diverse groups of students in meaningful and rigorous academic work, students and teachers becoming viable members of their own community, and staying the course

on reform efforts. Each of these outcomes is not easily attained—though over time King has made incredible progress toward these ends.

The purpose of my research is to explore how one school, King Middle School, successfully navigates the dilemmas that emerge when simultaneously engaging students in compelling interdisciplinary research projects *and* achieving high levels of proficiency on high-stakes tests. As I show, this school effectively negotiates potentially contradictory aims while more adequately serving a diverse population of children who might otherwise not have the same opportunity to learn. However, my main objective is not to prove the worthiness of successfully navigating these tensions; I believe wholeheartedly that this type of schooling is good for children. Instead, I examine how *this* school manages the challenges, thus providing a rationale to plan for, and equip, schools so that truly no student is left behind.

### Stories Worth Telling

King Middle School in Portland, Maine, was typical in many regards. It was a public middle school, one of three in this mid-sized U.S. city, and served an ever-increasingly diverse population of students: of the 535 students in the 2010-2011 school year 36 percent were foreign born, 21 percent's first language was not English, and 57 percent were eligible for free and reduced lunch. In the late 1980s and early 1990's King undertook major reform: at the heart was a de-tracking effort, flattening out what was a five-tiered system that spanned from the "challenged" to the "advanced" level. To support changing from a "school for some to a school for all,"<sup>3</sup> King adopted the whole-school reform model called Expeditionary Learning (see Chapter 2 for more on this model). Since 1993, King has stayed the course, mirroring research-based

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<sup>3</sup> King's principal, and several others, used this phrase on multiple occasions.

recommendations to stick with reform for *at least* five to ten years in order to demonstrate substantial growth in student achievement (e.g., Borman, Hewes, Overman, & Brown, 2003).

I first became interested in King Middle School through my Graduate Assistantship work with Ron Berger, Chief Program Officer at Expeditionary Learning. In an effort to create a searchable digital archive of high-quality examples of student work, Ron and I spent days pouring over hundreds of products of student work from around the country. I learned extensively about what King Middle School students had produced over the years and the remarkable ways that King's work had been shared locally and with educators around the country. I became hooked on beautiful artifacts of student work that were intentionally shared within and outside of schools.

I began my research at King in December of 2009, as part of a three-member team from the University of New Hampshire, studying student motivation within extended interdisciplinary projects, called *learning expeditions*, in a 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class. It quickly became clear that I could not adequately study what happened in this classroom, during this expedition, for this group of students, without also exploring related school-level circumstances. Once I began to learn about school-wide practices, the *history* of these practices also became essential. For example, while observing and talking to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students I was intrigued by the quality of their relationships with each other and their teachers. There were many reasons for this: 'looping' where students and teachers stayed together for 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade—relationships thus had been formed over 18 months; a school-wide emphasis on collaborative, respectful relationships; 'teamwork' skills taught and practiced during weekly Crew meetings (advisory-like small groups); and 7<sup>th</sup>

graders attended a three-day retreat at a local outdoor education center. Without examining the larger picture of relationship building at King I would have developed an inadequate understanding of what I observed in this one classroom.

Another pivotal realization came from witnessing the seemingly endless recognition that students and teachers, across the grade level, received for their work in Small Acts of Courage, an expedition on the Civil Rights Movement. This happened in ways small and big and occurred during and after the expedition. Sometimes the recognition was predictable, such as when interviewees expressed their gratitude at having their stories captured and published in professionally-bound books; other times the recognition was more unexpected such as when a state legislator hand-delivered a signed proclamation to the 7<sup>th</sup> graders stating the State Legislature's appreciation for their work on Maine's history during the civil rights era. I became interested in how sharing students' work with people outside the school, and the subsequent recognition, shaped not only *these* students and teachers, but also how it shaped King Middle School, as an institution, over time. These realizations led me to expand my research from one classroom to an expanded look at school-wide practices that supported 'making work public' and how these had evolved.

I chose the title—Stories Worth Telling—to highlight successful processes at King Middle School. During the 18 months of my research, I was regularly astounded by stories of success at both the micro and macro levels. The phrase 'stories worth telling' also is reflective of King because the school had a history of intentionally telling its own story. Within the pages that follow, I highlight several types of 'stories worth telling': (1) King's remarkable 23-year trajectory of establishing and sustaining reform; (2) groups of

diverse students engaged in rigorous academic work, on a moment-to-moment basis, through learning expeditions; and (3) documenting the stories of Portland individuals who played a role in the Civil Rights Movement.

These are stories worth telling about schools, students and teachers, and communities—ones that move us to understand the power and potential of participating in school and society, by creating products and performances that have value beyond the ‘wastebasket economy’ (Sidorkin, 2001) typical of public schools. As Sidorkin says, “the products of student work have *no utility*. The lack of motivation is a direct consequence of the fact that the things produced by students are useless” (p. 3, emphasis in the original). At King, in contrast, products and performances that have some worth beyond exchange for a grade (Apple, 2007) are a substantially different way to tell stories about students, teachers and schools: there is robustness to what can be conveyed through students’ live performances as well as the “hold in your hands”<sup>4</sup> examples of students’ work which in turn fosters a certain ‘way of being’ as a school.

### Conceptual Organization of Research

Throughout my dissertation, I intentionally zoom in and out, from wider landscapes to minute details, choosing to foreground and background certain features of a school/community (Rogoff, 2003). When foregrounding the wider landscape, or the ‘macro’ level, I focus on the school-as-a-whole as well as its function in the community. When foregrounding finer-grained details at the ‘micro’ level, I focus on specific artifacts of student work and moments of classroom interaction. At the ‘meso,’ or in-between, level I focus on classrooms and relationships among people connected with the school. At King, there are ‘stories worth telling’ at each of these levels. The themes I discuss cut

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<sup>4</sup>A phrase used by a teacher at King to describe the final product of students’ work.

across these levels, while occurring along different scales of time: from the faster-paced world of dynamic classrooms to the sometimes glacial-like movements of school change (Nocon, 2008).

First, at the macro level, I tell the story of King's successes and challenges. At King, 'telling stories' was pervasive and intentional, through prioritizing and demonstrating evidence of academic achievement to students, teachers and the wider community. King also had a 'story telling' history which partly originated in attempts to thrive despite local and state reform policies that favored quick turn arounds and defined success through raising test scores (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). At King, stories of learning were captured so they could be told; students developed skills to document and tell the story of their learning; and practices existed so King's stories could be shared locally, nationally and internationally. The sheer quantity of recognition that King received, after 23 years of reform, was astounding, getting more inquiries for information and visits to their school than they could handle: from international film crews to individual local teachers; from the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan to self-proclaimed, "King junkies."<sup>5</sup>

Second, at the meso level, I tell the story of Small Acts of Courage. This expedition is worth sharing because of students' collective engagement with content, how students' products and performances endured long after the expedition 'ended,' and because of the continuous recognition that students and teachers received. Additionally, because at the core of the expedition students documented and recounted Portland-area

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<sup>5</sup>A phrase a teacher used in a thank you note to staff after a day-long visit to King. She said, "I am now a Kingjunkie," in reference to her new-found and seemingly endless interest in King.

residents' stories about the Civil Rights Movement, students themselves learned - and produced—stories that were worth telling.

Finally, my research is also about 'stories worth telling' at the micro level—of one African American young man's notable engagement in Small Acts of Courage. Despite a marbled personal history with schooling, Michael's participation in *this* expedition was transformed to that of a model student. I explore Michael's in-class contributions, the connections he made with his interviewee, and his impressions of studying the Civil Rights Movement. Michael's story is compelling for several reasons. He was born in the Congo; his family left this war-torn nation when he was a baby, departing for Atlanta, Georgia, and then moved to Portland when he was a first grader. He is thus representative of the influx of immigrants and refugees from African countries who have settled in Portland in recent years. Michael's story is also intriguing because of why he believed in the worth of capturing untold stories of local community members: having learned for several years about the 'big names' of the Civil Rights Movement, he wanted these smaller, more local, stories to be known.

In my dissertation I do not tell all of the possible stories that are worth telling about King, Small Acts of Courage or about Michael. Instead, I intentionally share ones that exemplify, at multiple levels, people from different social worlds, coming together to successfully navigate the contradictions between organizing schooling to engage historically under-resourced students in meaningful academic work and the constraints of a climate of accountability and standards.

## Assessment as a Cultural Practice

In this section I introduce concepts that frame my exploration of King Middle School, Small Acts of Courage, and Michael. These are discussed in more depth in Chapter 3 and my theory-building chapters.

In the following quote, Moss (2008) establishes concepts critical to my underlying argument - the progress of all students, what constitutes success and the means for evaluating it, and how those processes impact learning:

Assessment activities, like all activities, are social situations...including physical and conceptual tools, routines through which assessment is enacted...and an implied trajectory of what counts as 'progress.' Assessment practices interact with other activities...to shape the learning trajectory of the group and its individual members. (p. 234)

The 'culture' of assessment at any school can be viewed at the whole-school level, in classrooms, and between the school and surrounding community. Although each social world might evaluate different 'things' in different ways, each involves people interacting, judging and making decisions about teaching and learning. What are the assessment 'routines' at each level? What 'counts as progress?' What do people consider legitimate markers of academic achievement? An expansive, cultural view of assessment means considering all of the different social worlds involved in the evaluative process of students, teachers and schools.

The overarching argument throughout my research is that the cultural practice of assessment shapes students, institutions, and communities (and vice versa). 'Assessment' is defined here simply as the process of knowing, or finding out, what someone knows. Beliefs are presupposed regarding what people within communities think is important to know and valid means of evaluating it.



Within educational reform in the United States there are two major contrasting cultural practices, each of which evaluates ‘knowing’ in radically different ways and leads to particular ‘outcomes’ for students, institutions and communities:

1. *Testing and corresponding accountability measures assume:* (a) Knowing (learning) is measured in abstraction (not in situ); (b) quantitative scores can be used to sort and rank students and schools; and (c) people are motivated to improve scores by positive and negative consequences.
2. *Situational performance as evaluation assumes:* (a) Learning is participation and it is through in situ participation that people demonstrate (perform) knowledge; (b) the artifacts that people produce are valid markers of achievement (i.e., participation) and performances are a means to evaluate the *function* of what is produced—did it do what it was supposed to do?; and (c) people are motivated toward participation because of a desire to be recognized as legitimate member of the community.

These two cultural practices entail radically different educational policies and school-based strategies. The first emphasizes assessment as separated from learning—i.e. ‘coming to know’ processes. The second emphasizes the inseparability of learning and assessment—they are indistinguishable. Therefore, examining *how* the cultural practice of assessment shapes student participation and school reform—and also how institutions and students in turn shape these practices – helps understand the impact of particular educational policies.

#### Overview of King’s Cultural Practice of Assessment

At King assessment is localized, with emphasis on students participating in their own assessment as well as in collaboration with the community. Although operating

successfully within the standards and accountability realm, King's cultural practice of assessment subverts many of the consequences of a 'measure and punish' climate by honing the craft of performing student work. Students generate products and performances through extended and intensive collaborative exploration with multiple stakeholders: each other, outside experts, and teachers. This work is purposefully shared with internal and external audiences, both during and at the end of learning expeditions. Examples of products include scientific reports written after conducting research alongside local scientists, publicly displayed works of art designed in consultation with professional artists, and professionally published field guides that were the result of research in local natural areas. Culminating performances include live exhibitions of student work such as speeches delivered to the Portland city council, musical recitals, or 'poster presentations' of work shared in a public forum.

The idea of *audience* is at the heart of the cultural practice of assessment at King. The audiences of student work have a kind of attention, investment, and care for student performances in part because of the work that some audience members do alongside students and because often audience members are stakeholders in what students produce. Here we see a relationship between *what* students produce, *who* is viewing that work and more substantial processes regarding assessment as a cultural practice. Intentionally putting work 'out there,' in front of an audience, engenders recognition through formal and informal evaluative processes.

Throughout this document, I analyze King's cultural practice of assessment, how it evolved over time, and how recognition was a constitutive feature of it. I examine the situational factors that fostered King's particular, successful means of engaging diverse

groups of students and the processes that laid the foundation for students, teachers and the school-as-whole to publicly perform their work.

### Research Overview

My dissertation is the result of an 18-month study at King Middle School that combined ethnographic fieldwork, in-class observations, and interviews with students and teachers. I used a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. The following questions guided my analysis:

*How does ‘making student work public’ shape the work that is done in one school across multiple timescales?*

- *How does ‘making student work public’ shape a student’s participation in a learning expedition about the Civil Rights Movement?*
- *How are artifacts of student work used by people from different social worlds to negotiate and sustain school reform?*

Taking on the feel of a book manuscript, my dissertation is organized in the following way. Section I establishes the overall problem and territory, while detailing the methodological approach to my research. Specifically, in Chapter 2, I explore the situation in which my research is located, from the landscape of school reform within a climate of testing and accountability to the particular setting of King Middle School in Portland, Maine. In Chapter 3, I lay out the conceptual and methodological framework that guided my research. Chapter 4 details the specific methods I used for data collection and analysis. After setting the stage for my research in the first section, in Section 2 I theory-build by analyzing data within and across timescales and grain sizes. More specifically, in Chapters 6 through 8, I intersperse analytical themes—which paint the story at the school-level—with interludes that tell the story of Small Acts of Courage and of Michael’s participation in this expedition. More than simply moving back and forth

between micro, meso and macro views of schooling, presenting data and analysis in this way allows the reader to make connections among themes and the dilemmas that arise across levels and scales of time. Finally, in Section 3, I share the significance of my research, focusing on three areas: (1) Methodological implications; (2) conceptual implications; and (3) practical implications for policy, schools and classrooms. My final chapter, titled “Performing School in a Way That Matters,” explores the meaning of engaging in academic work that is significant to students, teachers, schools and communities. Throughout my work I use short story-style vignettes to immerse the reader in the world of King Middle School—these are intentionally set apart from the rest of the text in gray-scale boxes. Doing so allows the reader to vividly imagine specific moments for students, teachers and the school.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUND

#### Contributing to Where Education Ought to be Going<sup>6</sup>

Since the passage of NCLB in 2001 the federal government has increasingly exerted control over school policy. Within this climate, some schools successfully negotiate dilemmas posed by innovating progressive reforms while adhering to standards and accountability measures. By studying King Middle School—an Expeditionary Learning (EL) school—I examine how tensions are navigated, focusing on how this school’s cultural practice of assessment both shapes and supports reform efforts. In this chapter I explore the broader context of my research, tracing shifting conceptions of, and standards for, assessment over time and across sites (i.e., from the national policy landscape to schools attempting progressive reforms). I consider my research aims within the following constitutive contexts: (1) School reform; (2) within the current standards and accountability climate; (3) by highlighting one model of school reform that has been shaped by this climate; (4) and presenting a case for examining a specific school, a particular learning expedition and an individual student.

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<sup>6</sup> This section header comes from a speech given by Paul Ylvisaker in 1987 at the International Outward Bound Conference - who at the time was the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education - in which he compelled Outward Bound toward “aggressive participation in the education dialogue” and “to contribute to where education ought to be going” (Cousins, 2000, p. 77).

## School Reform

While not an attempt to recount a full history of school reform in the U.S., in this section I share prevailing aspects of reform during recent years. Reform within public schools has wavered between adjustments to classroom practices and attempts at broader institutional and structural changes. Many reform efforts are cyclical, coming in and out of favor with changing political ideals. Despite considerable research into reform best practices, David and Cuban (2010) recently conclude that, because of shifting political interests combined with large bureaucratic systems, “Accumulated knowledge and wisdom are unlikely ever to be the driving forces behind enacted reforms” (p. 2). Additionally, although substantial research indicates that reforms should be sustained for at least five years, many efforts are at risk of being under-implemented because of the push to demonstrate improved achievement within one to two academic years (Fullan, 2007).

Comprehensive-school reform (CSR), also called whole-school reform, is seen by some as a panacea for struggling schools; others see it as too complicated and likely to result in failure (Sack, 2002). Efforts to reform whole schools, rather than simply making changes in classrooms, have existed since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (David & Cuban, 2010). In the 1990s, there was renewed emphasis on whole-school reform, fueled in part by the interests of the first president Bush, who supported funding for innovative CSR models. There are many well-researched challenges to CSR, including establishing a common vision, garnering support from multiple stakeholders, and measuring success (Fullan, 2007). Despite the knowledge base regarding whole-school change efforts, because of

lack of time, money or understanding, some reform efforts become a ‘flash in the pan’ in schools’ histories.

### The Rise of Standardization and Accountability

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The report detailed decreasing high school SAT scores while unfavorably comparing the achievement of students in the United States with those of other countries. By emphasizing the “new basics,” *A Nation at Risk* helped give rise to the era of conservatism and standardization to which the United States is still beholden (Koretz, 2008; Noddings, 2007). In light of what Goodman (2006) calls the ‘conservative restoration’, educational reform in the 1980s and into the 1990s dramatically narrowed to focus on results as measured by standardized tests. This established a constricted standard of ‘evidence’ by which reforms were evaluated, and as reforms were instituted, many were prematurely abandoned because of a lack of improved achievement.

The trend toward standards and accountability was vigorously expanded with the passing in 2001 of the federal education legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This bipartisan attempt to legislate ‘equity and excellence’ by focusing on closing the achievement gap, mandated testing in grades three through eight and once in high school, school choice, and a system of school-level accountability called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Current extensions, based on similar reform logic include Race to the Top, a state-by-state competition for federal funds; the related push to adopt the Common Core Standards by each state; and tying the allotment of federal funding to systems that evaluate teachers’ performance, and reward accordingly, based, at least in part, on students’ test scores.

The failure of NCLB has been well-documented and well-publicized (e.g., Ravitch, 2010). Test scores have not risen substantially for the students the legislation was targeted toward (e.g., Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Kober, 2009). Some cite lack of funding for NCLB's reparative measures, while others fault the nature of the system itself. Part of the argument against high-stakes accountability measures are the corresponding actions states, districts and schools are pushed toward: for example, lowering performance levels so that more students appear to be reaching higher levels of proficiency and widespread cheating on the tests (Ravitch, 2010).

Part of the bind that many educators find themselves in is that the ideals of NCLB are hard to argue against: high expectations and equitable opportunities are needed, yet the provisions of NCLB restrict the possibility of implementing innovative reforms. The *end* is warranted; however inadequate *means* circumvent the high-minded outcomes.

How then do school-reform organizations respond to the current public school climate while simultaneously attending to the needs of historically under-resourced students? In the next section I briefly present one organization—Expeditionary Learning—and their reform efforts within this ongoing educational dilemma.

### Expeditionary Learning

Given the landscape of school reform over the past 20 years, several factors have shaped the emergence and expansion of Expeditionary Learning: (1) The Outward Bound movement; (2) the legacy of aspects of the progressive movement; (3) the rise of standardization within public schools; and (4) whole-school reform efforts. By briefly exploring EL in light of these factors, I make a case not for doing research *on* EL, per se, but instead for examining processes within one EL school. Part of my reason for locating



my study thusly is that ‘highly implementing’ EL schools score higher on standardized tests than comparisons (Expeditionary Learning, 2011) all the while implementing practices rooted in ‘experiential’ and student-centered pedagogy. One can therefore expect tensions between these conservative and progressive reforms to be quite visible within EL schools.

Origins. Following on the heels of more idiosyncratic classroom-level models, EL is an example of whole-school reform arising out of the larger political trend toward systemic and institutional reforms. Specifically, in 1993, Expeditionary Learning - previously Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound Schools—was awarded a multi-million dollar grant supported by President Bush and funded by the New American Schools Foundation (NAS) to develop and implement their whole-school design in ten schools (Berends, Bodilly, & Kirby, 2002). Now in over 160 U.S. schools, EL claims to improve academic achievement through “a *coherent* and *mutually reinforcing* set of effective approaches to teaching and learning for the entire school” (Berends et al., 2002, p. xv, italics in the original).

The original EL model attempted to fuse the philosophies and methods of Kurt Hahn, Eleanor Duckworth, and Paul Ylvisaker. The design was based on ten Design Principles, shown below in Table 1 (Cousins, 2000). Duckworth’s *The Having of Wonderful Ideas*, exemplified a constructivist approach to involving students in question asking and contributed to the inquiry-based approach of learning expeditions. Ylvisaker, the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, spoke passionately about reforming education. Hahn – who I discuss more below – developed the “Seven Laws of

Salem” which were precepts of his first school<sup>7</sup> and can be seen in the guiding tenets of EL.

Table 1  
EL’s Design Principles and Core Practices

Design Principles	Core Practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The primacy of self-discovery</li> <li>• The having of wonderful ideas</li> <li>• The responsibility for learning</li> <li>• Intimacy and caring</li> <li>• Success and failure</li> <li>• Collaboration and competition</li> <li>• Diversity and inclusivity</li> <li>• The natural world</li> <li>• Solitude and reflection</li> <li>• Service and compassion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning Expeditions</li> <li>• Active Pedagogy</li> <li>• Culture and Character</li> <li>• Leadership and School Improvement</li> <li>• Structures</li> </ul>

EL’s Core Practices, also seen in Table 1, arose from attempts to operationalize research-based practices inline with the Design Principles. *Learning expeditions*, interdisciplinary projects in which students explore community-based research questions were classically at the heart of the model, though now have taken a less prominent role as the organization focuses on practices that support learning expeditions such as student-engaged assessment and differentiated instruction. The EL model emerged through these philosophies and practices, but also specifically out of the Outward Bound movement in an attempt to translate aspects of wilderness education into schools.

The legacy of Outward Bound. Outward Bound came to the United States (referred hereafter as OB USA) in the early 1960s as a translated version of Kurt Hahn’s work during the 1930s, 40s and 50s in Germany and then later in the United Kingdom.

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<sup>7</sup> The Seven Laws of Salem include: 1) Give children the opportunities for self-discovery; 2) Make the children meet with triumph and defeat; 3) Give the children the opportunity of self-effacement in the common cause; 4) Provide periods of silence; 5) Train the imagination; 6) Make games important but not predominant; and 7) Free the sons of the wealthy and powerful from the enervating sense of privilege (Cousins, 2000).

OB USA was originally focused on providing intensive 28-day wilderness experiences, which was a departure both from Hahn's residential schools such as Gordonstoun and from his more facility-based approach to adventure experiences (Miner & Boldt, 2002).

Despite a focus on the 28-day "short course," OB USA was interested from nearly the beginning in wilderness courses for teachers (Miner and Boldt, 2002), in many ways following national reform trends that aimed at not only working with students, but developing the people who worked with students. The impact for teachers was not thought to be bringing new instructional practices back to classrooms but instead more about participants looking at themselves *as teachers* in new ways. As the director of the Dartmouth Outward Bound Center said, the strength of these courses was that teachers left "relating to their students much more as human beings, having a much greater sense of caring and feeling about their work" (Miner & Boldt, 2002, p. 236).

Around the time they started offering teacher courses, OB USA began another shift—one that furthered the trend toward higher-impact interventions - establishing the "equivalent of the mountain in the city" (Miner and Boldt, 2002, p. 282). The emphasis on teacher and urban-focused initiatives coalesced into a coordinated 'bringing OB to the schools' movement, resulting in the evolution of OB USA's philosophy from "changing the world one *person* at a time" to "changing the world one *organization* at a time" (McQuillan, et al., 1994, p. iv, my emphasis).

Overlapping with the start of OB USA's Urban/Education Initiative—a 10-year effort funded by a 2.9 million dollar DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Foundation grant—in 1988 the Harvard-Outward Bound Project on Experience-based Education began, forging a formal partnership between OB USA and the Graduate School of Education at

Harvard University (Miner & Boldt, 2002). This project launched EL; those collaborating under this umbrella created the original whole-school design model (McQuillan et al., 1994).

The legacy of arising out of the OB USA movement can be seen in the ideology of Expeditionary Learning and in individual EL schools. For example, the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning, states the following as their mission:

As a K-12 community, the mission of the Rocky Mountain School of Expeditionary Learning (RMSEL) is to empower students and staff to be learners, thinkers, citizens, and explorers engaged in and inspired by the real world. "We are crew not passengers."

In the above statement, several of Hahn's philosophies—adopted into OB USA methodology—are evidenced: the notion of students as explorers, being engaged citizens, and students and teachers as 'crew not passengers'. Other metaphors from OB USA helped shape the direction of whole-school reform efforts. For example, the phrase 'getting all students to the top of the mountain' was adopted by early EL schools as a metaphor for envisioning de-tracking—all students having the opportunity to be academically successful in school.

Progressivism. Although called a "mélange of reforms we have come to lump together as progressive education" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 271), many of EL's influences relate to progressive-era reforms that were championed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Though short-lived, in the 1960s and 1970s there was also a burst of so-called progressive energy within public schools in the United States (Adams & Reynolds, 1981; Ravitch, 2000). Termed open and/or free, these schools emerged in part out of the political tumult of the 1960s and the humanistic theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004) and corresponded with the self-

actualization mission of OB USA. Pinar et al. (2004) explain that the curricula within many of these schools were built around the notion of an ‘open classroom,’ group inquiry, exploration of self and others, dealing with societal problems and focused on social change. This movement was critiqued in part because of what Ravitch (2000) describes as a lowering of academic standards. She portrays this era disparagingly saying: “An open school emphasized projects, activities, and student initiative. Its teachers were ‘facilitators’ of learning, not transmitters of knowledge” (p. 395).

Echoing Dewey’s calls in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ultimately the demise of the free school movement was predicated by a lack of structure in many schools/classrooms which decreased the focus on academics; the perception that the movement worked for privileged students but not for poorer ones; and an absence of evidence of achievement. As EL emerged in the late 1980s, their direction toward whole-school reform in part attempted to resolve the inherent tensions of this movement while building on some of the same educational ideals.

Recognizing the educational climate in which EL as an organization—and individual EL schools—emerged and continues to work within, sets the stage to explore how schools, and King in particular, negotiate the tensions between progressive reforms and accountability pressures. In my research, King serves as an ideal case because of their long-standing and ever-growing accomplishments.

### Who is King Middle School?

As one of the ten original demonstration sites, King Middle School has been an Expeditionary Learning school since 1993. Considered exemplary, in 2011 King was named a ‘mentor school’ within the EL network. Because part of the purpose of the

original NAS grant was not only to implement but also to develop the EL design, King pioneered the evolution of the EL model, while contributing to the reform's architecture and expansion nation-wide. The persistence, despite increasingly encroaching district, state and federal accountability measures, that King has shown at sticking with and improving *this* whole-school reform model over time is remarkable.

King Middle School is the most racially, ethnically, and economically diverse middle school in Maine (King Middle School). The school's demographics have shifted considerably over the last 20 years. In part the result of waves of refugees from African countries, particularly from Somalia, and the services the city of Portland provides to newly arrived immigrants, 36% of King's students are foreign-born. King's reform efforts have sustained, and thrived, through - and perhaps because of-what some would call an increasingly challenging population of students. Given King's demographics, it is also noteworthy that students at this school consistently performed higher on state standardized tests than other middle schools serving similar populations, as well as outpacing state averages (Expeditionary Learning). Thus, King provides a case example for other schools in similar situations to consider means for providing a heterogeneous student body with the opportunity to learn and to succeed academically.

King's principal, Michael McCarthy, has been at the school since 1988. His 23-year tenure is well beyond the average length of principals both in Maine and nationally. Miller (2010) found that the majority of public schools in the United States have principals who have been at their school for fewer than five years. In the state of Maine, researchers found that 33% of principals leave their position in less than two years and 50% in less than five years (Buckingham, Donaldson, & Marnik, 2005). A competent leader,

who maintains a vision for reform - across several decades - provides institutional consistency and an opportunity to see success evolve.

King receives accolades and publicity for their successes. In 2010, King was featured on Edutopia.org (the George Lucas Educational Foundation website) as a “School that Works.” In 2010 Michael McCarthy received the Principal of the Year award from the state of Maine and was a runner up in the National Principal of the Year award of the same year. King has been named a “Spotlight School” every year since 2003 by the New England League of Middle Schools and was recently featured on Maine’s Department of Education ‘newsroom’ website in a short piece titled, “King Middle Turns Around with Expeditionary Learning.”

A notable example of King’s recognition was a visit by Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, in August 2010, as the final stop on his cross-country “Courage in the Classroom” bus tour. Despite policy initiatives supported by Duncan that contrast with King’s approach, Duncan said at this event, “This is the way kids want to learn.” His visit gave students a chance to showcase their work and brought regional attention to King.

The structural and cultural features of King are distinctive. The school is organized into two ‘houses,’ Windsor and York, each of which contains a 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade class of approximately 80 students. As previously mentioned, King practices looping, where students and teachers stay together for the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Also, teachers meet collaboratively, for 90 minutes, every other day. The schedule is a complex, six-day rotation that maximizes flexibility while equalizing time among different subjects and alternating times of day. Each year, students participate in two learning expeditions, the

design and implementation of which are organized collaboratively by grade-level teaching teams. These teams include a math, science, social studies and language arts teacher, as well as an English language learner, a special education and related arts teacher—all are considered ‘core’ teachers and all contribute to planning and executing expeditions. House teams strive for interdisciplinary curriculum, integrating content from multiple disciplines, though some expeditions are more focused on a few content areas, while others come closer to complete integration. Despite their innovative ways, King also appears as a typical middle school. Students move between classes in core academic subjects, students sometimes sit in desks arranged in rows and teachers often use traditional teaching practices. King has found a balance between the progressive and traditional that allows for innovation within the dictated and familiar organizational structures of public schooling.

### Small Acts of Courage

I began my research at King immersed in one learning expedition and with one group of 7<sup>th</sup> graders. I chose the Small Acts of Courage expedition for several reasons. First, the topic of study—the Civil Rights Movement—was compelling because of the potential connection between an ethnically diverse group of students’ lives outside of school with the content of this time period. Second, the Social Studies and Language Arts teachers—Caitlin LeClair and Karen McDonald, respectively—who designed and implemented this expedition were known to be strong implementers of expeditions, and were valued both inside and outside of King. Finally, because both teachers had attended an EL Learning Expedition for Educators in the summer of 2009 in Little Rock, Arkansas, there was a way to examine how EL directly influenced the process and product of this



expedition. At the outset, I and those directly involved, had no idea about the unpredictable ways that students would participate in, and be acknowledged for, their contributions to this project.

Although the expedition had several phases, at its heart, students, in small groups, interviewed local members of the Portland community who played a role in the Civil Rights Movement. Teachers found the interviewees by directly contacting individuals, placing ads in the local paper, and word of mouth. The five major phases of the expedition included: (1) Building background knowledge about the Civil Rights Movement, focusing on events, people and the struggles at the national level; (2) preparing for interviews; (3) conducting interviews; (4) preparing written narratives based on the oral histories; (5) preparing for and performing at the culminating event; and (6) Reflecting on the process.

After spending weeks building background knowledge and preparing for the interviews, students, in groups of three or four, asked their interviewee questions about his or her role in the national discourse on civil rights. Students digitally recorded the interviews, listened to them multiple times, and then wrote narratives based on what they gleaned. Students did more than simply retell the stories they heard; they made connections to their own evolving understanding of the tumult of the 1950s and 1960s. As was evidenced through my research, students took pride in their work. They wrote multiple drafts, receiving feedback from their teachers, peers and the interviewees themselves. Their work resulted in two products: (1) A set of professionally-bound books that contained students' written narratives; and (2) a culminating event, in the school's cafetorium attended by over 100 people: all 80 students took the stage in a well-

coordinated production that included read-aloud snippets of written narratives, photographs of interviewees, student-made documentaries, and a musical performance by students of a civil rights-era song. After the culminating event, students gave copies of their books to each of their interviewees and to a local university's African American special collections library.

Here would seemingly be the end of an extraordinary interdisciplinary middle school project. But, the students' work—and that of their teachers—lived on beyond the planned time frame, exceeding expectations for the project. Consider the range of the following examples:

- Some students remained in contact with the person they interviewed, including one student's family who had monthly dinners with the interviewee.
- A local minister, who students interviewed for this project, delivered a sermon the week after the culminating event, in which he brought the students' work to this new audience. He said in reference to the students' Culminating Event, "As we, the guests, sat in the front rows of the auditorium I suspect we were touched by similar feelings. Something like 'look at this beautiful array of children of every color and hue and numerous countries of origin, language and religious traditions, all together in one class, one place, one school.'"(McCall, 2010, May)
- Students' work was displayed and sold at the Abyssinian Meeting House in Portland, Maine—the third oldest African-American Meeting House in the U.S. The funds raised went toward the building's ongoing restoration.
- During a visit to the school from the U.S Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, in August of 2010, students' showcased their work, talking to Mr. Duncan about their project, sending him back to the White House with two signed copies of their books – one for him and one for his boss. See photo below.

Figure 1

Three students and Caitlin sharing their work with Arne Duncan



[Photo by David Grant – used by permission]

- Students, in January 2011, were asked to speak at the unveiling of a portrait of a well-known local African American leader, the person 10 months prior they had interviewed for this project. (See Interlude #3 for more information.)
- Four students were invited to give a keynote address in front of 800 educators at a national conference, at which they shared their experience learning about civil rights. (See Interlude #6 for more information.)

Small Acts of Courage was an exemplary expedition, providing a robust situation in which to study features of expeditions, including assessment practices, as well as how individual students attended to, and participated within, these curriculum structures.

### Who is Michael?

Four students, from one of four 7<sup>th</sup> grade Social Studies sections, were studied more closely, based on Caitlin's assumption about their willingness to assist with the project. The particular class –“B-block”–was chosen out of the four possible because of placement in the schedule; Caitlin had planning time often directly before or after this block, which facilitated our communication. The four students–Michael, Collin, Jamie

and Sarah<sup>8</sup>—turned on digital audio-recorders when the class shifted into small group work. The four focal students were neither intentionally put together nor separated: Caitlin frequently created new groups and all students in the class moved in and out of working with most other students.

Although four students were followed, here I look closely at one student—Michael, a student who “lit up” during the expedition (as per Caitlin’s observation)—to examine how his participation was shaped. In part, Michael’s engagement was different than it had been in other expeditions—he was thoroughly engrossed in the material and showed dedication to high quality work. Although Michael had a history of intermittent behavioral issues, during this expedition, as described by Karen, he shined “as though a spotlight was turned on behind him.” I was interested in why his participation shifted during this expedition and what his engagement looked like during whole-class conversations and small-group work, what he would say about his participation in interviews, and how this would manifest in his performances and the work he produced.

A second reason I chose Michael was that out of a diverse group of 22 students—15 were White and seven were of varying minority backgrounds including Latino, Somali and other African heritage—he was the one African American male in the class. Empirically, I was interested in exploring if and how Michael’s racial/cultural/gender background shaped his participation in Small Acts of Courage.

A final reason I continued to follow Michael was he was one of four students to interview Gerald Talbot—one of the 22 community members interviewed during this expedition. Although it wasn’t until after the expedition that I learned about his personal bond with Mr. Talbot, Michael’s connection to this well-respected figure in Portland and

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<sup>8</sup> Names have been changed to preserve the anonymity of students; King staff agreed to be named.

in Maine's African American community was a compelling example of the power of students doing meaningful community-based work. Mr. Talbot was the first Black Maine State Legislator, an early president of the Portland branch of the NAACP, the co-author of *Maine's Visible Black History: The Chronicle of its People*, and contributor to the African Americans of Maine Special Collection at the University of Southern Maine's Glickman Library. A year after the interview with Mr. Talbot, Michael said that he considered "Gerry" his friend and someone he greatly admired.

### Summary

In this chapter I established the broader landscape in which my research is situated. I also provided rationale for choosing my setting and population. Given the complexities of both schools-as-institutions as well as school reform under NCLB, to adequately investigate my questions I needed a comprehensive conceptual framework that necessitated analysis of both the 'whole' and its constitutive features. In the next chapter I present a conceptual and methodological overview, centering on a sociocultural approach to human development.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

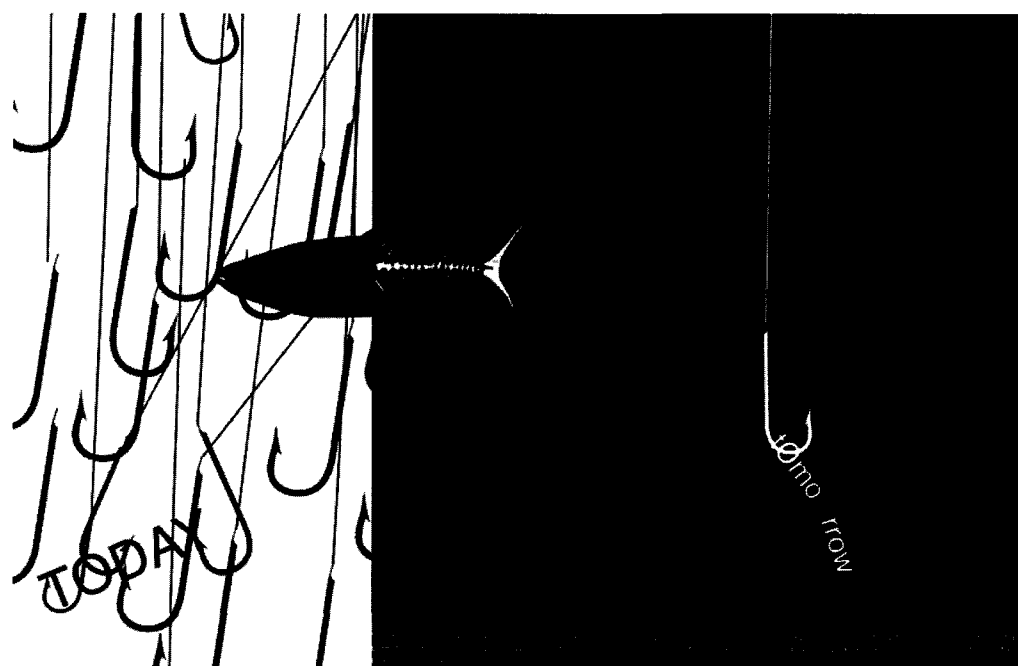
*As I teacher, I am constantly amazed by the quality of work my students produce. Each year their work gets better and better. While certainly a factor of improving my own skills and strategies, each year I witness a process in which last year's students' products and performances compel a new group to go bigger and better. A recent example happened in the Truth or Consequences expedition. During this expedition, students explored the intersection of truth in advertising, propaganda, current topics, and graphic design. For their final product, students created a poster - following professional standards taught in collaboration with professors and students from the Maine College of Art - that conveyed a complex and controversial topic in an eye-catching, compelling way. Examples of topics included teen suicide, sexual abuse, access to affordable health care, and global poverty. To get their work out in public and in front of an audience, students secured spots for their posters in public places and local businesses. [See Figure 2 below for an example of a student's work on the economic and environmental consequences of overfishing.]*

*Although as teaching teams we often create new expeditions, there is value in re-doing expeditions with subsequent years of students. In Truth or Consequences, for example, part of the benefit was that each year the product of students' academic explorations got better and better. This is not always the case - sometimes new groups of students have a hard time repeating the success of the first years' production. Even though each year a new group of students participated in the expedition, the quality of students' final product improved dramatically. In the first year, students did not have other students' products to work from; however, by the second year, students began their product development by critiquing last year's crop of posters, analyzing them for strengths and weaknesses. In Truth or Consequences, now in its fourth year, students build off of the quality attained in the three previous years. Also, as in most of my teaching, the first time through a unit or lesson is somewhat experimental - over time I work out the kinks, change how I emphasize key areas and adopt new forms of technology. Other factors that improved the quality of my students' work were that, over the years, our relationship with Maine College of Art grew and students shared their work with wider audiences.*

In this opening vignette, I present a teacher's perspective on one way that student work can evolve over time. This process was common at King: assessment and public sharing of students' products and performances formed the heart of curricular logic. In this example, student learning—as demonstrated in products of their work—is distributed across people, artifacts, and time. In this chapter, I discuss the conceptual and methodological framework that guided my research at King Middle School and provided a theoretical perspective for making sense of instances similar to the opening story. I present a framework that allows for a “whole-is-greater-than-the-sum-of-its-parts” approach, which affords a way to analyze across students, classrooms, objects and time.

Figure 2

An 8<sup>th</sup> grader's poster depicting the impact of overfishing<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>9</sup> The text at bottom of this poster says “The techniques used to find and catch fish are so technologically advanced that we can catch huge amounts of fish, fast and accurately. The problem with this is that the fish can not reproduce fast enough. If this continues the fish will become commercially extinct, resulting in a total collapse in the oceans ecosystem.” For additional student work related to this poster, see Appendix D.

My aim here is to provide *sensitizing concepts* that establish the conceptual territory into which my study falls (Blumer, 1969). These concepts then suggest a specific methodology—or approach to research. In the chapter that immediately follows, I take up these conceptual and methodological guidelines and recount the concrete steps I took to collect and analyze data.

### Conceptual Framework

#### Sociocultural Perspectives on Learning and Development

Because ‘making student work public’ was a school-wide process and developed across time, I adopted a sociocultural approach, in which the unit of analysis “captures the situation as a whole” (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 193). Although there are differences within various sociocultural perspectives, there are consistencies across different theories (Roth and Lee, 2007) including: (1) A shift in the unit of analysis away from the individual and toward the collective, where a school is seen as “a system of interdependent processes” (Lemke, 2000, p. 275); (2) in a two-way interaction, a person is impacted by context and context is inevitably changed by that person (Moss et al., 2008); (3) knowledge is considered shared among people and across objects and time and thus “neither learning nor development is an individual accomplishment” (Holzman, 2006, p. 8); and (4) artifacts, tools and objects are seen as mediating devices essential to understanding the complexities of any system, including classrooms and schools (McDonald, Huong, Higgins, & Podmore, 2005). Among related sociocultural theories, activity theory, or cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), derived from the work of Lev Vygotsky (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978), provides a particular framework for exploring the system of ‘making work public’ at King.



When these premises are applied to the Truth or Consequences vignette, *how* student work improves each year can be better understood. By thinking of students' posters as 'mediating devices,' the artifact of student work translates meaning within and across communities. Additionally, considering knowledge as not simply existing inside someone's head, but as 'shared across time' and among people, skills and content gleaned in one year, by one group of students, can be seen as impacting students in the next. In our everyday lives this is often true – in schools, however, this is stymied by the type of work students are typically asked to produce – work that has little consequence to students, their teachers, the surrounding community, or across time.

Assessment, then, viewed through a sociocultural lens necessitates a shift away from viewing individuals and individual assessment practices as isolated entities. A sociocultural perspective takes into account the social, cultural and historical factors that have produced, and are produced by, that person or persons. Additionally, Lund (2008) says that social practices are “mediated by a number of social, material, and contextual means” that “involve[s] learners' capacity for sharing and constructing knowledge through joint efforts and by using available artifacts” (p. 34). Using a sociocultural perspective to examine schools allows for an analysis of assessment across related social worlds, artifacts and time: simply looking at one teacher's assessment practices would produce an inadequate view—it would only tell a story of the relevant classroom factors and thereby ignore larger social, cultural and historical processes that shaped student engagement and academic achievement for students in that classroom.

Despite recent sociocultural work that has foregrounded assessment as a way to explore how processes within classroom/schools systems enable or constrain students'

participation (Moss, Pullin, Gee, Haertel, & Young, 2008) - which has also been developed by Delandshere (2002), Gipps (1999) and Shepard (2000)—only a handful of empirical studies have used a sociocultural perspective to examine the practice of assessment and even fewer school-wide assessment systems. Those that have (e.g., Crossouard, 2009; Lund, 2008; Roth, 1998; Smith, Teemant, & Pinnegar, 2004; Webb & Jones, 2009) have employed varying methods for analyzing and thus describing the ways in which classroom and school-based assessment practices and processes contribute to students' academic participation and the productive engagement of communities.

Drawing again on the opening vignette, a multi-leveled approach is necessary to explore how student participation, as partly evidenced in the quality of final products, evolved and how 'assessment as a cultural practice' might impact this trajectory. First, at the macro level (whole-school and between school and community), this kind of project connects the school with community-members who see the school as caring about complex, societal issues. Publicly displaying these posters creates, in part, an unknown audience of community members who judge the content and quality of work. Second, at the meso level, groups of students and teachers collaborate each year to create high-quality work using previous years' work as a starting point. Finally, at the micro level, individual students participate in academic work, responsible for creating their final poster. Assessment practices also happen across a multi-year trajectory and within individual moments, which occur simultaneously and constitute each other. For example, students engage in peer critique of their posters before displaying their final work in public. On a larger timescale, multiple forms of evaluation, from various sources, foster higher quality work by *new* students. All of the evaluation inherent in this example

constitutes the cultural practice of assessment: not just of this expedition, of this class, but contributes to the cultural practice of assessment at this school. A sociocultural perspective is necessary to make sense of cross-school practices, across time, and their bi-directional influence on students, teachers and the community.

As introduced in the first chapter, foregrounding the cultural practice of assessment is critical to gleaning a well-rounded perspective of the situation-as-a-whole of a school. However, conceptualizing assessment is challenging; in everyday use the term is vague. It is too vague because “assessment” refers to individual practices i.e., an end-of-the-unit test. At the same time assessment, as a concept, is also unclear because the term ‘assessment’ alternatively refers to evaluating student outcomes, measuring the strengths and weaknesses of a program, or soliciting individual student reflection. However, when assessment is thought of as a cultural practice differentiating the *ways* in which assessment happens in a classroom/school/community comes to the forefront. The purpose of differentiating assessment in this way allows the *process* of assessment at a school—and the means through which various practices are enacted among audiences/communities—to be examined.

Jordan and Putz (2004) suggest a framework that distinguishes between inherent, discursive and documentary forms of assessment, helping refine the idea of assessment as a cultural practice. *Documentary* assessment fits a conventional notion of assessment; one in which evidence is collected and used to evaluate learning or performance. Jordan and Putz explain *discursive* assessment as “occurring when members of a social group talk about what they are doing in an evaluative way” (p. 346). The authors purport that people talking about how they judge themselves, and the criteria used for that evaluation, is a

pervasive form of assessment that occurs with and without facilitation. Finally, Jordan and Putz explain *inherent* assessment as “happening informally and nonverbally in all social situations” (p. 346). Inherent assessment constitutes an ongoing backdrop for how people judge what they are doing, how they are doing and what one’s plan of action is. As the authors state, “these endogenously generated assessments are inherent in the social scene of ongoing classroom activities” (p. 349) and I would add among people from different, interacting social worlds. Conceptualizing assessment as inherent, discursive and/or documentary expands the notion of assessment to include not just what is directed by a teacher, but also other types of assessment that happen continuously within and among schools, classrooms and communities.

Part of adopting a sociocultural approach means viewing learning as participation in communities rather than discrete knowledge that accumulates inside of individuals (Lave & Wenger, 1991). When assessment occurs as not separate from, but instead *is* learning, the well-used phrase “assessment *for* learning” instead of “assessment *of* learning” (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2007; Torrance, 2007; Wiliam, 2011) from a sociocultural perspective also comes to mean assessment that contributes to an individual’s participation in a community. In this sense, assessment is contextual, embedded in learning activities and can be considered ‘ecologically valid’ (Roth, 1998).

Hedegaard (2002) provides an understanding of how student work, assessment and community-school connection can be mutually constitutive. Through her extended empirical work in classrooms, she hypothesizes that classroom factors “joined forces to form one dominating motive: to perform well within a *social* forum” (p. 179, my

emphasis). She also found that, “An important facet of this work in relation to the development of a sense of class solidarity was that the children produced something which others could see and evaluate...that there was an audience...” (p. 92). Hedegaard’s work points toward the importance of the social environment as the means through which student work is assessed and the recognition that is inherent in sharing work with an audience.

### Audience, Recognition and Community

At the heart of ‘stories worth telling’ at King are the intentional and sustained efforts to have students perform their work in public—to share stories of teaching and learning via the tangible products and performances of learning expeditions. In this section I offer conceptualizations of *audience* and *recognition* to explore how performing work can shape students’ participation in academic endeavors while also helping the school sustain innovative reforms. When student work is showcased in front of live, in-person audiences, notions of audience *and* community, and subsequently student, teacher and school-as-a-whole recognition, intimately comprise the cultural process of assessment.

The most prevalent way that ‘audience’ is discussed in educational literature is through the process and product of writing (Many & Henderson, 2005). Writing, unlike other forms of student work (such as a set of math problems), is presumed to have an audience—or, said differently, an *effective* writer takes his audience into consideration. Whether or not they have an *actual* audience, students are taught to have an audience ‘in mind,’ imagining that they are writing to a specific person or category of people. Writing at schools like King does take on this sense of audience. However, writing for an

audience, in these cases, is usually not imagined; writing is the means to an end (i.e., sharing research findings) rather than *the* specific end.

Magnifico (2010) explores how an audience impacts a writer's *motivation* to write. She asks the important question, "Why does audience matter?" to a writer's motivation. She argues that actual audiences provide feedback to writers and thus can engage students in the writing process. When the gap between writer and audience is closed, "something more closely approximating orators and live audience members" (p. 168) is achieved.

With the advent and proliferation of electronic media, the *potential* audience of student work has changed significantly. For example, the accessibility of the web affords an instant form of publishing (Magnifico, 2010) both via sites where work can be directly published and self-publishing websites such as [www.tikatok.com/](http://www.tikatok.com/) and [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) (Heyer, 2009). Summarizing the benefits of sharing work with an audience, Magnifico suggests that, "electronic media not only democratize publication and content creation but also make it possible for writers to speak with, ask questions of, and be influenced by an audience of readers" (p. 168). This notion of interaction—whether occurring online or in person—is a critical aspect of how and why students are asked to share their work with audiences.

Audiences of student writing are often thought of as abstract rather than something tangible and known (Many & Henderson, 2005). Just the idea of someone outside of self and teacher—whether known or not—propels students to pay closer attention to their work and thus engages them in a rigorous pursuit of higher quality work (Levy, 2008). During Small Acts, students knew that a draft of their writing would be shared for

review with their interviewee—this caused at least one student to say, “We couldn’t make things up—we had to get it right.”

When asking the question, “Why does audience matter?,” the answer partly lies in the role of the actual audience and in considering why being a *member of an audience* might matter. Audience members play the role of witness or evaluator; they are potentially entertained, informed, emotionally wowed or in awe of students and their work. Ultimately, audience members share in the practices of a community and have a stake in what is performed or presented.

Another way to think about those who produce work and those who view it is as the two having a *dialectical* relationship. Here there is no distinction between audience members and students (or between producer and consumer) and both are conceived as being constituted by the other. Prior (2003) takes this a step further; he thinks of an audience as actually being part of the ‘collective actor’ that helps conceive of, and generate, a piece of work. He says, “those who use and consume documents are not merely passive actors in the communication process, but also active in the production process itself” (p. 16).<sup>10</sup> Thus, audience members can be considered explicit shapers of what students produce.

Here are a few examples to illustrate how audience members (or audiences-as-a-whole) might shape what students produce. As students wrote narratives about their interviewee’s role in the Civil Rights Movement, they knew they were in part writing *for* these people. Not only did each interviewee give feedback on a draft of their written narrative, students gave copies of the book to their interviewee. In a more complex

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<sup>10</sup> Prior uses the word ‘document’ to describe things that may begin as “containers of content” (p. 3), but actually are artifacts integral to social and cultural processes – hence my assertion that performances and products of student work are a type of document.

example, consider the 8<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in an expedition called The Four Freedoms. Students' Culminating Event was an opening exhibition/public showing of their work at the Portland Public Library during one of the city's monthly First Friday gallery walks. Each students' work consisted of two parts: (1) A collage of images and words that represented one of the four freedoms as discussed in a 1941 speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt—freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from fear, and freedom from want - as applied to current events in the United States and around the world; and (2) a written piece explaining their collage. Although the audience in this example is less known, the *idea* of audience seems no less powerful in shaping students' work. Students knew from the beginning that their work would be professionally hung in the gallery, thus students developed their artwork to match their, even if unformed, vision of who might view or critique their work. Also, given the content of their collages and writing—from gay rights to the war in Iraq—students dealt with provocative and complex topics that aimed to engage audience members in thinking critically about their presented topics.

Considering audience members as co-authors of student-produced products and performances points toward why 'making work public' is not just a potential shaper of student engagement, but also why an audience member might be transformed through being an audience member. There is a reciprocal process at work here, one in which both student and audience not only exchange something, but mutually benefit from that exchange.

Another useful way to think about 'audience' is to examine how students' products and performances become "tool[s] with full social meaning" (Miettinen, 2005, p.



58). When students create work that is taken up and used in meaningful ways, the artifacts they produce become resources for people in the community/members of the audience. For example, by donating their books to a local university's African American special collections library, students' academic output literally became a tool that others could use in their own historical investigations of the Civil Rights Movement. Additionally, students frequently used their own work to propel their future work forward, such as using interview questions to perform the interview, the recorded interview to write the narrative, or the written narratives to perform the Culminating Event. Here students become their own audience, taking up and using their own work.

Building on the above thoughts about audience, here I layer in Miettinen's (2005) sociocultural concept of "desire for recognition" with the collaborative production of student work. In the following quote, Miettinen connects 'making work public' with how people need, strive for, and receive public acknowledgement:

An individual becomes universally recognized by participating in cultural activities, and this participation is objectified in the products of her acts (inscriptions, memos, drawings, scientific papers...). These achievements constitute the objectified demonstration of the capabilities of the individual to contribute to the vitality of the community. (p. 63)

In Miettinen's view, when students—individually and collectively - actually make contributions to the "vitality of the community," their sense of self and community is transformed, as are relationships among students, teachers, and the community.

There are, of course, many forms of recognition possible within schools—but at schools where students engage in community-based investigations, recognition is grounded in the possibility of making tangible contributions to one's own community and thus establishes the importance of being recognized in meaningful, instead of superficial,

ways. Magnifico (2010) says:

Young writers...are seen through the lens of *what they contribute*. In this sense, it is much easier for them *to gain recognition* for their expertise and accomplishments...As a result of this active audience collaboration and feedback (which stands in contrast to the more passive, evaluative feedback of grades and teacher comments), this writing feels consequential, motivating, and interesting (p. 179-180, my emphasis).

In light of the preceding overview, and, coming back to the question, “Why does audience matter?,” I purposefully draw connections here between the role of audience, the recognition that students, teachers and the school receive, and how both are inseparable from interaction with, and in, the community. When students perform their work to real people from their local community they develop a relationship with a local audience. With an ‘authentic’ audience, not only do students have people interested in their work, but there are also tangible *social* consequences to their work if they produce something of shoddy, or even mediocre, quality (i.e., letting people down or embarrassing one’s self). If, however, students produce something of value, the social consequence becomes recognition for their contributions and acknowledgement that they are a participating member of the community. Audience members do not passively observe or consume student work – they instead are active evaluators, and hence producers, of students’ performances.

As I show in more detail in Chapters 6 through 9, the reciprocal and dialectical relationship between school (i.e., students, teachers and the institution) and audience/community establishes the cultural practice of assessment that, in turn, shapes King-as-a-school. This two-way, ongoing interaction has unique features and compelling consequences for student participation, the trajectory of school reform, and the kind of recognition that students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole receives. In the next section

I turn to the study of artifacts—what students actually produce – as a way to examine the implications of ‘making student work public’ for student participation and for sustaining innovative school reform in the current climate of standards and accountability.

### Artifacts

Artifacts play a central role both within actual classrooms and schools and the theoretical constructs of sociocultural frameworks, however very few studies examine the trajectory of specific artifacts and their “influence on human functioning” (McDonald et al., 2005, p. 113). Even fewer studies focus explicitly on what students create—and the process through which the artifact is generated. However, studying both the process of creating artifacts and the trajectory of these products post-completion affords an examination of how students engage in the work, enables understanding across different groups of people, and is one route to understanding how school-reform efforts can be sustained. Thus, foregrounding tangible, collaboratively produced student work is a way to understand not just *that* student work functions in this way, but *how* it does and the potential implications.

Examples of student work—especially culminating products and performances—are artifacts not just of the seemingly static demonstration of students’ academic accomplishment, but also of the tangible and lasting evidence of the *process*. Artifacts, by Hodder’s (2003) definition, “endure physically and thus can be separated across space and time from its author producer, or user” (p. 155); studying the ways artifacts are produced, used and interpreted is a viable means for understanding these particular artifacts as cultural tools. In speaking about artifacts in classrooms, McDonald et al. (2005) say that, “They are simultaneously a record of the past and an agent for

transmission of their meaning and use into the future” (p. 114). Going back to the Truth or Consequences example, the posters that students created in one year were *both* a historical record of those students’ work as well as a resource for future students.

Wartofsky’s (1979) conceptual analysis of artifacts illuminates the possible ways that students’ products and performances could function as artifacts and as tools. He states that, “the crucial character of the human artifact is that [it]...can be transmitted, and thus preserved within a social group, and through time” (p. 201). He hypothesizes that the critical role of artifacts is in the development and perpetuation of the species, stating, “the *artifact* is to cultural evolution what the *gene* is to biological evolution” (p. 205, italics in the original). Although lofty, seeing students’ performances as central to the evolution of a school’s cultural practices is a pathway to understanding student participation (i.e., the opportunity to learn) and the levers for sustaining school reform.

### Boundary Objects

My interest in students’ products and performances partly lies in how artifacts can have a ‘life of their own,’ translating meaning across time and space. Publicly showcased student work creates ways for people from different communities to share ideas, communicate cross-purposes and collaborate. Thus, student work can be considered *boundary objects*—artifacts and concepts that connect people from different social worlds (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Boundary objects, which Star and Griesemer (1989) describe as a “key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds” (p. 393) provides one entrée into interactions among the different social worlds of schools. Boundary objects transmit information between divergent but related systems and thus provide critical, supportive links. Boundary objects also help resolve “central

tensions” (p. 387): pervasive dilemmas or contradictions that define what people labor over. Empirically, it is possible to see these tensions, by not just looking at the physical product, but by capturing how people talk about, interact with and use that piece of student work. In the case of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students learning about the Civil Rights Movement, the tensions included the differing perspectives and aims between: (1) Students and their interviewees; (2) teachers/ administrators and students regarding the overall object of work; (3) the covering of standards versus an in depth exploration of a topic; or (4) means for evaluating student work according to grades, community interests, and student participation. The product itself becomes a tool to highlight and resolve these tensions.

In a recent review of research about boundary objects, Akkerman and Bakker (2011) emphasize that, “All learning involves boundaries” (p. 132). Based on their analysis of conceptual and empirical research about boundary objects and boundary crossings, they present four mechanisms that “constitute the learning potential” (p. 142): identification, coordination, reflection and transformation. Student work has the potential to serve in many of the ways these authors describe, including as a *communicative connection* by establishing the means through which people from different communities collaborate, *enhancing boundary permeability* by creating conduits between related, but different, social worlds, and *perspective making* by “coming to realize and explicate differences between practices and thus to learn something new about their own and others’ practices” (p. 144-145).

Finally, Star and Griesemer (1989) provide a way to study the role of boundary objects saying that, “Only with tracings from multiple starting points can we begin to test the robustness of the network” (p. 396). Sociocultural theory, which necessitates an

interrelated analysis, is an apt framework to examine these systems from multiple starting points. And, as Venkat and Adler (2008) say, sociocultural “theory works well to describe, explain (and celebrate) the minutiae of the inception and incorporation of change” (p. 139). By exploring the system from multiple points of entry, I examine both the “minutiae” of everyday classroom interactions as well as the more macro world of school culture, and how both shape and constitute how students’ products and performances (i.e., artifacts) act as boundary objects.

### Timescales

Lemke (2000) says that “*things*...as usually defined, are not dynamical notions: they are ordinarily defined in terms of their stable and persistent, or invariant, properties” (p. 275, italics in the original). The same can be said of artifacts, and specifically of students’ products and performances; the common notion is that documentary evidence produced remains “as is.” If, rather these artifacts are thought about as “change and doing”, “dynamical” and interacting across different scales of time, they carry “meaning...through participation in networks of interdependent ecosocial processes” (p. 275). Given Lemke’s analysis, it is possible to trace an artifact’s “unique historical trajectory” (p. 278) simultaneously in fast-paced classroom interactions and slow-paced school change efforts.

The idea of timescales also helps explore why the value of student work is not merely about literal benefits or “material affordances” (Lemke, 2000, p. 280), but also about the cultural meaning it acquires over time. Lemke’s use of the term *heterochrony* provides a way to look at student work as simultaneously “playing different roles in different situations” (p. 281). For example, the written narratives from the civil rights

project translate information to parents, are an immediate form of summative assessment for teachers, and foster recognition from community members. Accordingly, the process of working on this project contributes to a historical understanding of the Civil Rights Movement while also, during single moments in classrooms, provides fodder for individual and collective actions and learning.

### Summary

When conceptions of boundary objects, timescales, audience and recognition are considered together, from a sociocultural perspective, publicly shared student work—in the form of products and performances—can be brought to the center of a school’s cultural practice of assessment. The cultural practice of assessment at many schools exists across time and at multiple levels. Recognition, as a mode and constitutive element of assessment, is both produced and is inherent in the activity itself, creating the means by which students are seen as contributing members of the community. In the next section, I specifically address the methodology I adopted, which is based on the above conceptual framework.

## Methodological Framework

### Combining Timescales and Grain Sizes

Throughout my research, I attend to the simultaneous processes of school reform efforts and student participation in school. Because both co-occur and yet operate at radically different timescales, my methodology allows for analysis at multiple levels. At the same moment that a student clicks “print” on their final draft of writing, the machinations of school change slowly progress. How do the seemingly glacial movements of school reform impact moment-to-moment student learning? How do the

fleeting instances of student engagement shape school reform? In my dissertation I attend to a range of timescales, alternating between the processes of school reform and specific instances of student engagement—while focusing on how ‘making student work public’ functions within this social world.

To explore my research questions, doing one level of analysis without the other would be inadequate; to not take into account the “the ways in which contextual factors mediate the particular events analyzed” (Roth, 2005, p. 21) would generate an insufficient account of classroom experiences during the Small Acts of Courage expedition. Accordingly, to only examine the larger grains of the institutional setting would obscure the detailed “minutiae” of what occurred on a moment-to-moment basis within a classroom (Venkat & Adler, 2008).

There have been recent calls for research that is both multisited as well as multiply-grainsized. Barab, Hay, and Yamagata-Lynch (2001) argue for methodologies that “equate multiple time scales and multiple interactions in a manner that supports tracing the historical development of a practice, conceptual understanding, resources, or student-constructed artifact” (p. 106). Rogoff (2003) argues for research that embodies “different analytical views of ongoing, mutually constituted processes” (p. 52). From this perspective, although one might choose to bring certain phenomena into the foreground, while intentionally putting others in the background, “the distinctions between what is in the foreground and what is in the background lie in our analysis and are not assumed to be separate entities in reality” (p. 58). Rogoff and colleagues describe three foci of analysis - personal, interpersonal and community (Rogoff, Topping, Baker-Sennett, &



Lacasa, 2002)—and in many ways my own analysis tacks back and forth among these three analytical entry points.

While doing analysis at multiple levels, Wortham (2006) urges researchers further - to go ‘beyond the micro and macro’ and consider that, “In addition to identifying the timescales and resources most relevant to explaining a focal phenomenon, an analyst must describe how the various components interrelate” (p. 46). Therefore, part of my methodological approach is to not simply identify and analyze at different scales of times and at different levels, but to also explore the tensions and dilemmas that arise when comparing data across grain sizes and measures of time.

Lemke’s (2000) notion of timescales also necessitates analysis on multiple levels and specifically of the function of student work as artifacts across scales: information collected from a specific learning expedition, with a particular group of students as well as school-level practices, is a way to explore the situation on several timescales. Lemke (2000) says, “...and it is the circulation through the network of *semiotic artifacts* (i.e., books, buildings, bodies) that enables coordination between processes on radically different timescales” (p. 275). This is critical to my project: examining how products and performances functioned *specifically* because they were made public, provides more than a justification for studying these processes, but also a way to study them. And, when an artifact of student work is considered a boundary object, it “participates in processes at more than one timescale and constrains them both” (Wortham, 2006, p. 46).

Given my unit of analysis—the situation-as-a-whole—Tables 2 and 3 below show the various timescales and grain sizes that were possible analytic entry points.

Table 2

Timescales Relevant to My Study

Timescale (Research project example)	Amount of Time
<i>Public schooling at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century</i> (Accountability and testing climate)	Century
<i>23-Years of reform at King</i> (The “McCarthy Era”)	Decades
<i>Improving the implementation of Expeditionary Learning</i> (The “developmental approach”)	Years
<i>Learning expeditions</i> (Small Acts of Courage)	Multiple months
<i>Chunks of expeditions</i> (Prepping for the interview)	Multiple days
<i>Class periods</i> (Practicing the interview)	Hours
<i>Episodes</i> (Receiving feedback on interview practice)	Parts of hours
<i>Nodes</i> (Exchange of dialogue)	Moments
<i>Speech turns</i> (One ‘line’ of dialogue)	Seconds
<i>Utterances/gestures</i> (Smiling)	Fractions of seconds

Table 3

## Grain Sizes Relevant to My Study

Grain Size (foregrounding example)	Situational Example	Examples of Artifacts Used or Produced
<i>School-reform model shaped by current US educational policy</i> (foregrounding national discourse)	Responding to federal, state and district testing requirements	Sharing aggregated test scores with school visitors and community members
<i>Developing school-wide curricular and cultural practices</i> (foregrounding staff discourse)	Meeting as a staff to create 'student-engaged assessment' strategies	Developing and using the "6-Step Planning Guide"
<i>Grade-level participation in learning expeditions</i> (foregrounding students and/or teachers across 80-student and 8-teacher group)	Expedition kick-off establishing grade-level expedition expectations	Producing four-volume set of interview narratives  Delivering culminating performance
<i>One classroom's trajectory through a learning expedition</i> (foregrounding one class)	B-Block developing their own way of moving through civil rights content	Small groups' creating interview questions/protocols
<i>One student progressing through a learning expedition</i> (foregrounding interactions within small groups, with teachers, with students and with community members)	Student negotiating the development of interview questions with group members	Written narrative (drafts and final product)

Another way to make sense of multiple levels across different scales of time is through Roth and Lee's (2007) dialectic analogy of threads, strands and fibers. In my research I 'set' the magnification level to illuminate the grain size of interest, at particular moments in time. Roth and Lee say,

A unit can be analyzed in terms of component parts, but none of these parts can be understood or theorized apart from the others that contribute to defining it...Looking at a fiber, we cannot know what it does unless we look at its place within a larger system and at its relations with everything else (p. 196).

Layering this analysis onto my own project, the following comes to light: one student, Michael, as a ‘fiber’; who is part of a ‘strand’ the collective of the 20 other students/fibers in his class and/or the 80 students who are members of his House, all of whom participated in the Small Acts expedition; these strands then comprise the ‘thread’ of the larger school community. King, however, could also be seen as a strand, when combined with other schools and community organizations become strands of the larger Portland community. To look at any one aspect, without considering the others is to unjustifiably disconnect the parts from the whole. Therefore, in my own analysis, I alternate between attending to micro, meso and macro-level processes (i.e., fibers, strands and threads) while also looking across levels.

### Studying Artifacts

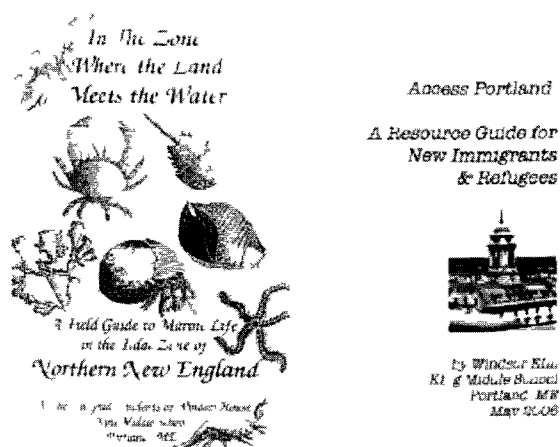
This Frankenstein-like quality of documents, that is the capacity of humanly created artifacts to serve as active agents and counter-agents in fields of social action, is not to be underestimated. (Prior, 2003, p. 14)

Historically, researchers studying documents have focused on content rather than how people produce or use artifacts (Prior, 2003). Analyzing the content yields information that only takes a researcher so far. However, by studying “documents in their social setting—more specifically on how documents are manufactured and how *they function* rather than simply on what they contain” (p. 4, my emphasis), leads to a more robust analysis. It became clear early on in my research that through the process of ‘making work public’ students’ products and performances were critical to understanding student participation as well as how the school sustained innovative reform practices.

Take for example the three culminating products displayed in Figure 3. In the top left corner, the cover of a student-created field guide, *Into the Zone*, is shown. This book,

completed in 1995, had ‘Frankenstein-like qualities’ both inside and outside of King. Both the format of this artifact (a field guide), as well as the quality of student writing and artwork, is seen as groundbreaking along the trajectory of products created at King—held up as a model at King, and also nationally within the Expeditionary Learning network. This field guide helped to transform what it meant to do good work and served as an expedition exemplar. Even as recently as the 2010 National Expeditionary Learning Conference, 15 years after students had completed their work, during a keynote speech in front of 700 educators this product (and the expedition that produced it) was used to exemplify robust learning expeditions and exceptional products.

Figure 3  
Cover Pages of Three Products of Student Work



King Middle School Portland, Maine

In the top right of Figure 3, *Access Portland* is shown, a one-of-a-kind cultural field guide to the available community-based resources for African immigrants, that was created by English Language Learners from King, many of whom were themselves recent immigrants. The project allowed students to simultaneously work on academic goals such as English language speaking and writing skills, while creating a resource that did not exist—a detailed guide to the businesses, city-based services and recreational opportunities for people from different African backgrounds. By putting their knowledge, which they accumulated through out-of-the-classroom research, into an easily-accessed document, with a field guide-like format, students made their work available for use by members of the community.

Finally, at the bottom, is Volume I of the four-volume series of books that students produced in Small Acts of Courage. How did handing copies of this book to Arne Duncan translate meaning about students' work? Who will access and use their books at the special collections library? How did having their books featured on Expeditionary Learning's website impact other teachers interested in doing a similar expedition?

How then, methodologically, to actually do what Barab et al. (2001) call capturing the object of your analytical interest “as it unfolds in its full contextualized splendor” (p. 108)? In the next section, I share the specific methodology I chose to best address my research questions, given the conceptual framework I have laid out.

#### Adopting a Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory is a qualitative research approach that aims toward “an analytic interpretation of participants' worlds and of the processes constituting how these worlds

are constructed” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 508). Using a grounded theory approach, one builds a middle-range theory that is rooted in the data and yet helps explain phenomena in similar situations. The theory I develop here started with how members of the extended King community created, used and interpreted students’ culminating products and performances. However, as I built my interpretation of the data I generated theoretical concepts about the meaning of ‘making student work public’ at the broader level of assessment as a cultural practice within the current climate of standards and accountability in U.S. public schools. As Charmaz (2006) says,

Grounded theory involves taking comparisons from data and reaching up to construct abstractions and then down to tie these abstractions to data. It means learning about the specific and the general – and seeing what is new in them—then exploring their links to larger issues or creating larger unrecognized issues in entirety. An imaginative interpretation sparks new views and leads other scholars to new vistas. (p. 181)

The grounded theory approach I used to collect and analyze data fits more within constructivist (e.g., Charmaz), rather than classical (e.g., Glaser), notions of grounded theory. Accordingly, I acknowledge that my own subjectivities influenced the way I viewed data and that ‘sensitizing concepts’ established interpretive lenses for my analysis. Although I see my research as interpretive of the situation at King, I do not consider my findings to be the only ‘truth’ that is possible to be learned about the school-as-a-whole, teachers, students or the community.

### Situational Analysis

As a grounded theory approach “that rounds the postmodern turn,” Situational Analysis (SA) is especially relevant to my project because of a focus on the *contextual elements* of any situation, allowing for analysis of the constitutive features of classroom and school-based interactions at King. SA, as an approach, also combines “narrative,

visual, and historical discourses...to expand the domains of social life addressed” (Clarke, pp. 30-31), which provides a particular way to analyze data from multiple sources, across different timescales, and from several levels. The conceptual framework of SA also fits well within sociocultural frameworks – although the two are not the same, both rest on similar assumptions: the unit of analysis is a system or entire situation; interactions among differing social worlds are important; and contradictions/tensions are sites of particular import. Finally, SA features boundary objects as “an important pathway into often complicated situations” (p. 51).

The use of “maps” is at the heart of data analysis within SA. Clarke (2005) says that mapping helps in “‘opening up’ the data and interrogating it in fresh ways” (p. 83).

The following three types of maps helped me interrogate my data:

1. Situational maps – I began with situational maps, where I abstractly mapped data, focusing on the relations between them. Following Clarke, I used the following categorizations of data: individual human elements/actors (e.g., students, teachers); collective human elements/actors (e.g., classes of students, teachers as a staff); temporal elements; nonhuman actants (e.g., technology); and spatial elements (e.g., layout of the classroom, location of school). Creating situational maps helped me “to direct theoretical sampling and/or refocus the interview questions” (p. 104). See Appendix C for an example.
2. Social worlds/arenas maps – Social world maps focus on the meaning-making of social groups and on collective action. This type of mapping helped me explore the following question: “What are the patterns of collective commitment and what are the salient social worlds operating” within and surrounding King (p. 110)?
3. Positional Maps – Finally, positional maps provided a way to explore “differences in discursive positions” (p. 126) and emerging tensions. Making sense of data through this type of mapping allowed me to consider all “*positions articulated on their own terms*” (p. 126, emphasis in the original). Importantly, positional maps are not a means for representing individuals or groups, but rather the different positions represented in the situation.



I picked my way through Clarke's suggested analyses, focusing primarily on the first two types of maps, all the while doing extensive memoing before, during and after creating the maps.

### Summary

In this chapter I laid out the conceptual and methodological frameworks that guided my research. Sociocultural perspectives on learning and development are at the center of how I conducted my research and analysis. Using the situation-as-a-whole as my unit of analysis was a starting point for exploration across grain sizes and scales of time. I used different entry points to analyze the cultural practice of assessment at King, focusing on the function of audience and recognition across social worlds. In Chapter 4, I make use of different ways of 'interrogating the data' to build toward my mid-level theory. I share the specific methods I used to collect and interpret data, which allowed me to take up and use the conceptual and methodological framework I laid out in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODS

In light of the conceptual and methodological ideas described in the preceding chapter, here I detail the methods I used to explore my research questions. I draw in part from ethnographic methods, entailing field-based, participatory data collection (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). I sought witness to my phenomena of interest, observing King in-action by ‘being there,’ conducting interviews, and collecting corroborating documents. Though using ethnographic strategies created opportunities and classic challenges, navigating King’s robust discourses in person allowed “direct apprehension” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 17) of the historical trajectory and current processes surrounding the cultural practice of assessment.

#### Data Collection

##### Fieldwork

My ethnographic fieldwork occurred in two overlapping phases: as a classroom observer during the Small Acts of Courage expedition and as a participant observer at the school level. To navigate a large public middle school while adequately exploring my research questions, it was critical to have a person who willingly played the role of my trusted guide. In seeking a ‘key actor’ (Fetterman, 2010), I developed a relationship with someone who would be an ongoing and fruitful source of empirical evidence and also be a conduit between myself and the rest of the school. David Grant agreeably accepted this role and was open to my presence. Although his job title—Technology Integrator—did not adequately capture the scope of his position, David’s 14-year tenure at King and the

trajectory of his ever-evolving job description—into a combination of curriculum and instructional strategist, media and technology teacher/advisor, and member of the school’s four-person leadership team—made him an ideal person to ‘hang around with.’

Between September 2010 and mid-March 2011, I made 25 visits to King, arriving at the start of students’ day and leaving at dismissal time. My work alongside David had several aspects: attending team meetings, joining in on hallway conversations with teachers, observing many media crew sessions, assisting with capturing and editing media, casual and more focused analytical conversations, attending all-staff meetings and access to two key leadership meetings. My status at King was as a participant observer, though my actual ‘role’ fluctuated and more typically was as an informed observer: at times I was actively involved in the work of the school and other times I was “looking and listening” (Lofland & Lofland, p. 19). The range of my role included: (1) At many meetings I was a fly on the wall, listening and observing the content and flow of discussion, but not contributing to the discussion; (2) during media crew sessions, I fluctuated between facilitating skill building (e.g., taking a group of eight students through an exercise about “taking the five shots”) and quietly observing; and (3) on several occasions I worked alongside David, helping him capture video of expedition episodes.

Two examples demonstrate my role as an insider/outsider. First, on March 7, 2011, I had what I consider one of my most privileged insider roles: I was the host for a group of master’s students from a New England university on their visit to King. I coordinated their visit by arranging classrooms in which they could observe, lining up teachers for them to talk to, and orienting them to the history and current status of King.

In this role I really was an insider/outsider, both a part of King but also external to everyday processes. In another of my key insider roles, I participated in many of the preparatory sessions of the four 8<sup>th</sup> grade students and their teachers as they practiced for their keynote speech in Portland, Oregon. I contributed to their overall progress, giving feedback about wording, tone and stage presence. Here I felt like a true contributor, which was echoed in a timely comment from David: he said that it seemed like I was really a part of King and that he saw me as an asset, which was his way of describing my unique role as a researcher and my involvement with these students.

Despite the ease with which I entered the school as a researcher, doing ethnographic fieldwork posed a few dilemmas related to informed consent. I gained David's verbal and written consent, following formal procedures dictated by UNH's Internal Review Board (see Appendix A for IRB approval letter). This was the clear part; however, in following David throughout his day, I inevitably interacted with nearly everyone in the building—teachers and students alike. It was not necessary (or feasible) to ask for consent from each person since I did not plan to use anyone specifically as data, but more to capture the essence of their interactions. I did inform all staff about my research by placing a short memo in each of their mailboxes (see Appendix B). Also, as I entered meetings with David, he or I would introduce me and my project and subsequently ask permission for my presence. Occasionally I was not invited in because of student confidentiality.

David worked well as a key actor for the following reasons:

- Located at the back of the library, David's office/classroom space was accessible from both the library and the back hallway. The only way into and through the library from this part of the building, and to gain access to the other side of the building without going around, was through David's room. He did not mind the flow of traffic:

some stayed for a moment to chat; others did not even make eye contact. This flow of students and teachers afforded a unique window into the comings and goings of people and David's interactions with them.

- By working alongside David, I got a unique view both into current expeditions - as seen through the production of media by students—and into the process of creating media with students. This out-of-classroom creation of products that were explicitly aimed at outside audiences was invaluable time spent watching and listening to the ebb and flow of this work.
- Over time, David consciously built trusting relationships with many of the staff at King. Because of our association, this allowed me to be also seen as trusted.
- David was part of the four-member leadership team at King, which consisted of himself, the principal, the vice principal, and the teaching strategist. His leadership role gave me access to leadership meetings as well as a certain kind of conversation/process as he engaged with others in the building.
- As part of his role, David also was an expedition planning consultant. Each semester he worked with one of King's two houses, attending each team's once-a-week collaborative planning meeting. I attended many of these meetings offering a view into how teachers worked together to plan and implement expeditions.
- David was also the school's web master and was therefore responsible for what was communicated to inside and outside worlds via the website. In addition to getting in depth tours of what was on King's website, I also was privy to David's inner musings about what should be on the web and how to make the site more accessible to various audiences.
- David was the school's primary contact and host for outside guests. During my fieldwork this included international film crews, teacher-groups from around the country, local individual teachers and other assortments of people. I was privy to his communication with future guests and I tagged along on a few of these visits.
- Finally, David was the school's liaison to Expeditionary Learning. Upcoming visits from EL staff, future EL professional development, and the overall and ongoing partnerships between the two institutions was negotiated through David.

In the end, David's flexible, full and diverse schedule provided exactly what I needed: access to multiple and varied aspects of King's ongoing reform efforts and the inner-workings of 'making student work public.'

### Audio and Video Recordings of Small Acts of Courage

In addition to the whole-school fieldwork, as previously mentioned, in the spring of 2010 I spent considerable time with students during their Small Acts of Courage expedition. Student dialogue, during most small group work sessions, was captured through digital audio-recordings. The four students in the focus group agreed to independently turn on digital recorders whenever they moved from full-class work to smaller collaborative class time. Although these sometimes were not turned on because students were absent, they forgot, or it was not clear when to do so, Michael created audio files on 19 different days, all of which I transcribed. There is a wide variety of what was captured on these files, including: types of activities students were asked to do in their small groups, group membership, and the content of students' dialogue and type of productivity.

Video recordings of class time were also collected. I, or one of the two other members of my research team<sup>11</sup>, was present during approximately half of the classroom sessions and for three of the extended out-of-the-classroom experiences (e.g., doing research at the University of Maine's special collections library). When one of us was not present, two student volunteers set up and turned on the camera. The video recordings captured whole-class sessions, but did not adequately capture small group work—hence the digital audio recorders. On several occasions, the student-set up video recordings contained a loud buzzing which drowned out much of the general classroom dialogue, though still allowed for the major classroom sounds to be understood.

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<sup>11</sup> Much of the Small Acts of Courage data was collected as part of a collaborative research project with Jayson Seaman and Michael Middleton in which we investigated student engagement and motivation through a sociocultural framework.

## Interviews

I conducted and transcribed 17 semi-structured interviews, always aiming to make sense of the data I had collected (Fetterman, 2010): (1) Caitlin, ongoing throughout the expedition; (2) the four focal students, together, mid-way during the expedition; (3) individual focal students several times, including Michael both during and three times after the end of the expedition; (4) all B-Block students, in groups of four or five, in their interview teams, at the end of the expedition; (5) Caitlin and Karen together, at the end of the expedition; (6) other key people at the school including the principal, related arts teachers and several long-term veteran teachers; and (7) two Expeditionary Learning staff who were pivotal during King's initial and ongoing adoption of the EL whole-school reform model. Who I interviewed and what I asked them emerged as I began analyzing my data and was aided by the theoretical sampling process I describe below.

## Artifacts of Student Work

Material artifacts such as students' academic notebooks and expedition folders and teachers' planning tools were collected and electronically scanned as corroborating evidence (Roth, 2005). Although I did not conduct detailed analyses of every artifact, the production and subsequent use of artifacts - both within the expedition and as they were perpetuated beyond the official scope of expedition - provided rich data for analysis of the overall process.

## Data Analysis

In this section I describe the various actions I took to make sense of my data. Despite the appearance of a linear structure, as fitting with a grounded theory approach, my means of analyzing data coincided with data collection. I began the process through

more specific protocols for the previously mentioned collaborative research project with others at UNH, which entailed detailed coding of classroom videos from the Small Acts of Courage expedition<sup>12</sup>.

### Writing Fieldnotes

As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) say, the choices made about what actually gets written down on the page is itself an act of data analysis. During my fieldwork, I turned each day's jottings into a narrative of my observations. In my writing, I did not attend to every detail of my experience; thus, I engaged in the initial stages of my interpretative work through decisions I made about what and what not to write about.

### Initial and Focused Coding

I started initial coding with a modified line-by-line approach—did not create a code for each somewhat arbitrary line of fieldnotes or transcripts, but instead coded relevant episodes—and in part used in-vivo codes that relied on people's actual words (Saldana, 2009). My codes remained 'close to the data' (Charmaz, 2006), and emphasized actions, coding actual "data as action" (p. 48, emphasis in the original). I revisited my codes, in part facilitated by using a two-step process in which I coded my fieldnotes and transcripts once 'by hand' in a Word document and then transferring, and sometimes changing, codes as I entered them into the NVivo 8 qualitative software program. During this process, I made no attempt to use duplicate codes or find multiple instances of specific codes. Also, many episodic-entries in my fieldnotes or segments of interview transcripts

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<sup>12</sup> The two coding schemes used were: 1. *Observing Patterns of Adaptive Learning*—OPAL—(Patrick, et al., 1997); and 2. Tharp's (2005) *Activity Setting Observational System* - ASOS. Through coding within the OPAL framework I was drawn to the coding categories of Materials and Formal/Informal Evaluation. ASOS coding allowed me a closer examination of classroom instances of Products, Joint Productive Activity, Responsive Assistance and Connected/Contextualized Activity Settings. Although this coding does not enter directly into my dissertation, it is important to acknowledge that the hours spent coding video provided specific instances in the large class, helping me sort through large volumes of data and to test my assumptions about important episodes.



received multiple codes. I reminded myself not to simply reduce data into smaller chunks, but instead to try to make sense of data through the creating of a code. By using phrases directly from my fieldnotes or people's spoken words, I retained initial sense of meaning. In other words, I did a round of analysis in my initial coding that went beyond mere description and included "explicating implicit actions and meanings" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50).

Table 4 below is an example of using initial coding on a segment from my 10/6/2010 fieldnotes, including modified line-by-line (i.e., "breaking the data up into their component parts or properties"), focusing on action and in vivo coding:

Table 4

Example of Initial Coding of Fieldnotes Using Modified Line-by-Line Coding

<p>In the middle of the day DG and I chatted about the "bias toward interrupting" that is present at King – that it in general is a positive thing, but not always. What he means here is a bias toward being spontaneous, going with the flow, and tending toward activity when it fits. This also related to DG's comment that at the end of some days he's not always sure what he's gotten done, what he's accomplished. He's tended to be more OK these days with not being able to put his finger on it on some days – and to value the process, even if intangible. He said that he "is like fascia" – that it is sometimes hard to define or see his role (or what he's actually getting done) but he aims to provide structure (and sees himself as providing structure).</p>	<p>Bias toward interrupting</p> <p>Being spontaneous</p> <p>Tending toward activity</p> <p>Being unsure of accomplishments</p> <p>DG is like fascia</p>
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As I progressed through my fieldwork, initial codes were also created by using the grounded theory method of 'comparing data with data;' I imagined how a particular bit of information compared with other related instances. Doing so segued into more focused coding, which I discuss below.

The precise point at which I stopped initial coding and moved to focused coding is hard to pinpoint—instead these two types of coding overlapped as I continued to code

new data while also beginning to retroactively apply more focused codes to previous data. I used focused coding as a way to begin building categories as the next step in the development of concepts/theories. Through a process of ongoing and extensive memoing, I used the constant comparative method during initial rounds of open coding (i.e., comparing data with data and then comparing data to codes). My strategy of collecting multiple types of data was critical—I could compare within *and* across types of data (i.e., interview data with video and audio recordings with documents with participant observation) (Seaman, 2008).

As I analyzed data, I created and refined focused codes by: (1) Comparing data with data—I went through each category and made sense of it based on the empirical examples; I then refined and rearranged the categories based on the ‘properties’ of the instances; (2) theoretical sampling—I collected more data based on initial findings, then refined (or not) categories based on a new round of theoretically-based empirical instances; (3) situational mapping—I went through the mapping exercises which pushed me to refine my emerging theoretical categories; and (4) memoing—applies to all of the above.

### Situational Analysis

As a way to make sense of data across “mulitsite/multiscape research,” Clarke (2005) uses an approach she calls “integrative and comparative mapping and analysis” (p. 176), which she defines as follows:

1. Integrative mapping—Many sources of data are connected and integrated across sites “asking what all of these data sources have to say about the phenomenon of interest. Codes are generated in/through all of the materials, sifted and coalesced

into categories in traditional grounded theory fashion” (p. 176). Maps are used to integrate all data.

2. Comparative mapping—In contrast, Clarke speaks of analyzing data sources individually and then comparing analysis across sites. One thus looks for similarities and differences across sites, including classroom interactions, student created artifacts and interviews.

My approach hybridized integrative with comparative: micro-level instances to the larger situation of King, but at the same time using examples of Michael and Small Acts of Courage to help make sense of the school-as-a-whole. Doing both allowed me to simultaneously compare Small Acts of Courage with King and then to integrate the two.

For example, looking closely at the way Caitlin talked to B-Block about the audiences of their work substantiates my understanding of how discourse about audience occurred and what it sounded like in relation to my broader, situation-wide understanding of audience:

Next Friday...we are all going to walk up to the Glickman Library...They are accepting our four volumes of our oral histories and they are making them part of that library. So, at our Culminating Event we shared and presented our work and celebrated our work with each other and with our interviewees and with our parents. And now next Friday we are going to be presenting it to a larger community that we aren't even really necessarily going to see. We are giving this to the special collections...they put out a press release for the media to come and they have invited some people on the board of the special collections...we are going to present our work to them and they are going to have some refreshments for us...It is a special event, so if you'd like to dress up.

I compared this example of audience-related discourse to what I learned about the school-as-whole-over-time, thus aiding my analytic understanding of the similarities and differences and how they helped me round out a situation-wide understanding of 'audience.' I might not have attended in the same way to the above example of 'audience'

within Small Acts of Courage, without my larger-grained analysis of the school-as-a-whole.

### Theory Building

To move from analysis to more conscious theory building, I “increase[ed] the precision of my categories,” while “explicating the analytical links between or among categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 105). I did this through extensive memoing, thoroughly examining each developing category, and collapsing and expanding theoretical themes. My process aimed to move beyond description in hopes of developing “theoretical categories derived from analyses” (Charmaz, p. 102).

### Member Checks

In an effort to confirm the direction of my claims about King Middle School, I asked several people to read through drafts of my writing. For example, in the spring of 2011, I sat down with Michael and asked him to read what I had written about him. With the exception of small factual errors, he agreed with how I portrayed his participation in Small Acts of Courage and his relationship with Gerald Talbot. Also, David Grant read through a nearly complete draft and provided several comments that clarified how I was talking about the trajectory of reform at King. Finally, I sent copies of my interpretation of teachers’ quotes to several people whom I interviewed.

### Final Methodological Thoughts

A major theme that emerged from my work was how making student work public shaped a sense of ‘being peered into’ at King. My own work, thus, was one more way that the school, teachers and students were peered into. This was not lost to me; on my visits I was aware of how my own questions and observations were part of the wealth of peering

into King that occurs daily. Despite my addition to what sometimes seemed like an overwhelming amount of attention, throughout my research I was continually surprised by how welcomed I was. This atmosphere mirrors my findings about this school – outside attention was appreciated and fostered a sense of professionalism and pride among teachers, administrators, students and community members.

### Summary of Section One

In the first four chapters I presented my research questions and established a framework that guided my analytical work. As I turn to theory-building in the Section Two, a few points to consider. First, assessment, as a social and cultural practice, encompasses a wide range of processes, from specific classroom strategies to the nature of the relationship between a school and its surrounding community. Second, the cultural practice of assessment at any school is shaped by layers of historical context, from federal educational policies to localized reform efforts. Third, the cultural practice of assessment can only be understood via analysis across scales of time and grain sizes, from student participation to multi-year reform efforts. The theory that emerges from my research of King Middle School, that I lay out in Section Two, addresses each of these three points.

## SECTION TWO

In this section, I present my interpretive theory of ‘making work public’ at King Middle School. My analysis aims toward explicating the cultural practice of assessment at King. To share the stories that are worth telling about King, I purposefully move back and forth between micro, meso and macro levels, addressing issues across different scales of time. I tell the story of Michael and the Small Acts of Courage expedition to exemplify the larger, emerging theory surrounding how schools, and King in particular, deal with contradictions between implementing innovative reforms, adhering to accountability measures and performing school in a way that matters. I illustrate and test my theory by sharing ‘interludes,’ finer-grained stories interspersed between higher-level themes, intentionally juxtaposing different, but simultaneous processes that constitute each other.

Rationale for examining my research questions at multiple levels and timescales comes from Charmaz’s (2006) notion of fit and relevance. She says:

Your study *fits* the empirical world when you have constructed codes and developed them into categories that crystallize participants’ experience. It has *relevance* when you offer an incisive analytic framework that interprets what is happening and makes relationships between implicit processes and structures visible (p. 54, my emphasis).

Given my project, I need to establish fit and relevance across moments of time, across configurations of people, and on different scales of time. Thus, in this section, I interrogate the theory as I develop it, ‘fitting’ it back and forth between moment-to-moment interactions within the classroom and the 23-year historical trajectory of King’s whole-school reform. I also explore how each is shaped by purposefully making work

public and, in turn, how the cultural practice of assessment is shaped by each of these levels.

The structure for Section Two is as follows: (1) In Chapter 5 I present the overall theory, in part by presenting a diagram, and describe the structure of my analysis; (2) In Chapters 6 through 8 the details of my theory build as I provide an analysis of each intertwined theme; and (3) Finally, in Chapter 9, I provide a concluding analysis.

## CHAPTER 5

### INTRODUCTION OF THEORY

*As you walk into King Middle School's 18<sup>th</sup> annual Celebration of Learning, held at Portland's Expo Center, you are warmly greeted by students. You, a visitor from the Portland area, sign in and then students lead you into the main arena. Looking around the vast, open space, you see students - and their work - spread out along the edges of the room as well as clustered in the center. Before looking closely at any one project, or speaking to a specific student, you absorb the overall feel of the space: excited energy as students anticipate their guests.*

*At designated stations, students from each house and grade level share their work with you from all of the expeditions they participated in throughout the year. Student work on display includes writing in different formats, vibrant art work in multiple media, documentary films about expeditions, and stations at which expo-goers don headphones to listen to student-composed music.*

*As you approach the different stations, students stand by displays of their work - both their final products and other evidence of the process of their expedition - and talk to you and the mostly adult audience. As you walk from table to table, you ask students about their work: What did they learn? Why did their work matter to them? Did they have fun? Every student - even the shyer ones - share their work articulately and with confidence. There is a palpable feeling of pride that infuses what each student says and how they say it.*

*At one table, three girls share their work from a World Languages expedition. They all eagerly describe their creations - original artwork that was done in the style of a self-chosen professional artist that they researched. Their piece of art depicts their own culture. These personal, yet public, works are amazing - not just the time and effort that each student must have put in, but the ways that each student merged the format of their work with the aspects of their own cultural backgrounds.*

*You notice that in addition to community members, over a hundred educators from around the country circulate from table to table. You hear both community members and educators ask students questions about their work. A few take pictures of student work. Teachers can be heard saying to their colleagues, "Oh, we have to do that with our kids!"*

*Several teachers from King are present, but they fade into the background, allowing students to showcase their own work. (continued on next page)*



*Near the end of your visit, you notice the principal hovering in the middle of the Expo Center, savoring the moment. To him, this represents what King is all about: children showcasing their work to people who are interested in what they produce. Adults are astounded by students' work. Students absorb the feeling and, from the principal's perspective, puff up with genuine pride in their accomplishments.*

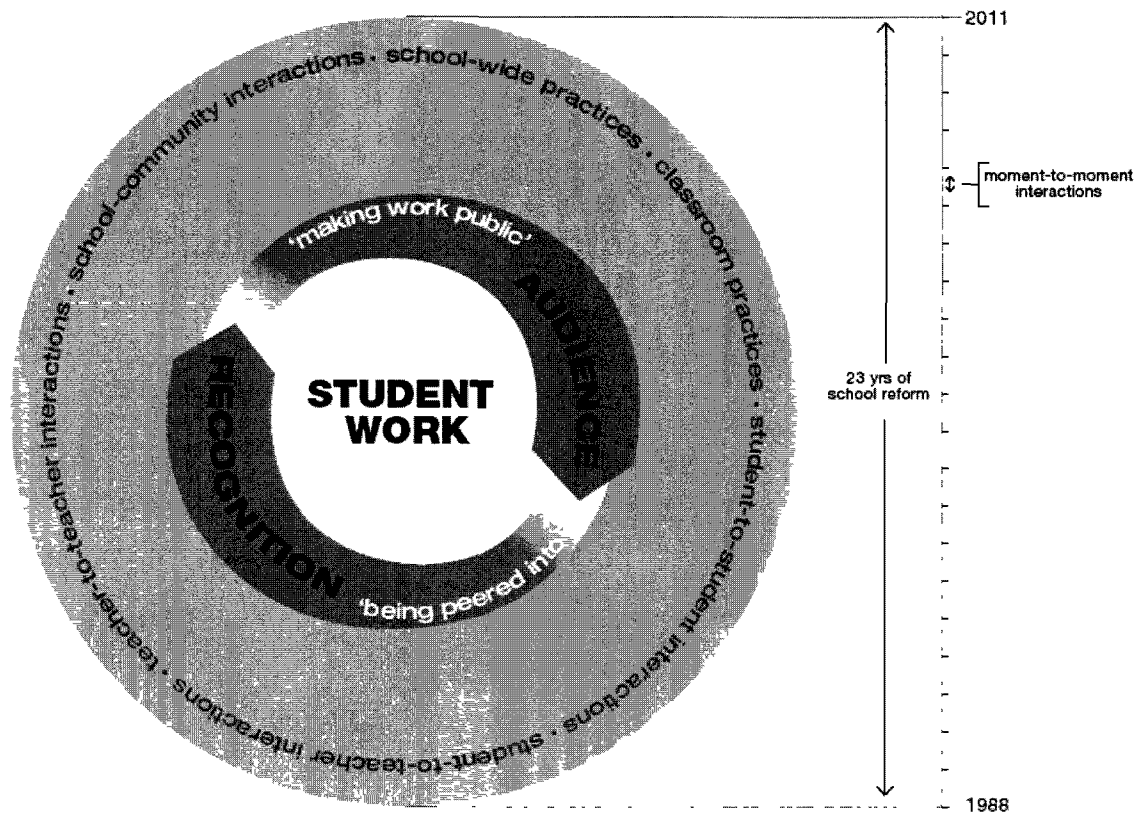
For the past 18 years, students at King have presented their work at the Celebration of Learning described in this chapter's opening vignette—work that during and after the expedition was also shared with audiences. The Celebration of Learning is a key aspect within the cultural practice of assessment of King and helps shape who King is as a school. In the following theory-building chapters, I explore what the cultural practice of assessment is and how it evolved over time. I also explore how it shapes, and is shaped by, student participation, and how it helps sustain and shape innovative reforms at King in the current climate of accountability and standards.

### Overview of the Cultural Practice of Assessment at King Middle School

My research at King led me away from a targeted study of one expedition and specific artifacts of student work and toward the *processes*—both current and historical—that surrounded not just the production of student work, but school-wide efforts to share this work with audiences. In this chapter I provide an overview of my theory and a road map for how I build it.

Several broad, cross-cutting meta-themes emerged about the cultural practice of assessment at King across different scales of time and at macro, meso, and micro levels. In Figure 4 below, I present a diagram of these higher-level themes and how they work together to form the cultural practice of assessment at King.

Figure 4  
Diagram of Emergent Theory and Meta-themes of the Cultural Practice of Assessment at King Middle School



At the heart of my theory is the process and product of student work—not just the tangible products and performances that result from learning expeditions, but the processes that generate these artifacts. At King, students’ products and performances were purposefully shared with audiences in many ways for multiple reasons: peers critiquing each other’s writing, working alongside community-based experts, presenting research findings to the city council. Historically, ‘making work public’ also included strategically putting student work in front of potential naysayers to garner support for

King's innovative reforms, such as eliminating tracking or students leaving the building to do fieldwork. Through empirical examples, I explore the intricacies of intentionally sharing student work with audiences and the different ways this shaped student participation, teacher professionalism, and school reform.

Because students' products and performances were purposefully shared with audiences, in the diagram, 'audience' emerges from 'making student work public.' These audiences were comprised of people with multiple perspectives and interests. Individually and collectively, publicly showcasing student work created opportunities for audiences to peer into King: into teachers' professional work, into moment-to-moment instances of student engagement, and into the tangible evidence of students' academic work. But, these audiences, because they were a known feature of expeditions, actually informed *what* students produced—hence the 'audience' arrow partly pointing back into 'student work.' Additionally, the 'peering into' by audiences entailed an evaluative component – on the one hand, the 'peering into' was *caused* by a prevailing notion that what happened at King was good; on the other hand, 'peering into' was also a type of scrutinizing, where people looked for signs of high-quality teaching and learning at King and attempted to understand it.

Additionally, 'being peered into' fostered multifaceted recognition: students, teachers, and the school-as-a-whole were acknowledged for their accomplishments. Recognition came in packages big and small, and was sometimes intangible: from local newspaper articles about recent expeditions to being featured on EL's homepage for delivering a keynote at their national conference; from handwritten thank you notes from visiting teachers to the principal being the runner up for the 2010 National Principal of

the Year. Part of ‘stories worth telling’ at King is not just that students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole were recognized, but *how* this recognition subsequently shaped King across multiple levels, including: who King was as a school, the kind of work that students and teachers produced individually and collaboratively, and community-school interactions, while also creating an ever-expanding audience of people interested in King.

Part of the intrigue of this emergent theory is that it is useful at multiple levels and across scales of time—hence the timescales on the right-hand side of the diagram. First, the cultural practice of assessment at King—and the inseparability of performing student work, audience and recognition—provides a way to examine how the school has shaped its own reform across 23 years. Second, the theory also applies to the radically different timescale of student participation, showing the significance of how a student’s participation might be shaped by publicly presenting his work.

In each chapter, 6 through 8, I showcase two themes, loosely bundled together, for a total of six themes. Within each theme, I highlight relevant tensions related to the cultural practice of assessment at King, while making connections across themes. Chapter 6, *Stories with a Purpose*, traces the emergence and trajectory of purposefully ‘making student work public’ at King. In Chapter 7, *Making Work for Someone*, I demonstrate how ‘being peered into’ happened at King because students publicly performed their work and how students participated in academics because their work was peered into. Chapter 8, *An Incredible Process of Evolving*, focuses on the role of teachers and staff at King and the evolution of school-wide practices over time.

Throughout Section Two, I explore the substance and edges of my theory across the chapters and accompanying interludes. As you read, pay attention to how the

interludes about Michael and the Small Acts of Courage expedition bring the meta-themes to life while also exemplifying each of the six individual themes. I use the interludes purposefully to show how my emergent theory applies, and develops, across micro, meso and macro levels.

I end Section Two by returning to a wider view of my theory, in Chapter 9, highlighting the ways that recognition and audience were produced through, and were important features of, students' and teachers' projects. I also analyze the function of artifacts of student work as boundary objects across all themes, demonstrating how students' products and performances helped perforate the traditional boundaries of what it means to do school.

## CHAPTER 6

### STORIES WITH A PURPOSE

In this chapter I trace the emergence and trajectory of purposefully ‘making student work public’ at King. Two themes are presented here: (1) Getting all students to the top of the mountain; and (2) Telling the story. The first gets to the heart of King’s de-tracking efforts and how sharing student work with the public played a role in sustaining reform over time. The second theme discusses the culture of telling stories at King—specifically, telling stories of student learning *for* the benefit of students as well to share the inner workings of the school. The two interludes in this chapter introduce the reader to who Michael is as a student and his reasons for documenting local individuals’ contributions to the Civil Rights Movement.

#### Getting All Students to the Top of the Mountain

King underwent monumental changes in the decade between 1988 and 1998. The effort, as one teacher put it, to “turn the battleship” from a tracked to an untracked school led to unprecedented growth in student achievement, drastically reduced behavioral issues and a hard-earned cohesiveness among staff. The underlying vision of the de-tracking effort was (and still is) a metaphor drawn from *Outward Bound*: instead of helping the already advantaged elite continue to be successful, the school would shift to “helping all students get to the top of the mountain.” Michael McCarthy, King’s principal of 23 years, often referred to the school in the late 1980s as having tracks ranging “from the highly anointed to the poor and pathetic.” In this sense, according to McCarthy, the

school in the late 1980s was really two schools—“one for the haves and one for the have nots.” In reference to the new vision, he said that, “We wanted to be a school for all...we wanted kids to be known. We wanted a culture of acceptance.”

The vast inequities in the quality of education that students receive in the United States is what some have called “the civil rights issue of our time.”<sup>13</sup> Instead of framing school reform around closing the achievement gap (or so-called ‘gap reduction’), King’s efforts fit more with increasing students’ *opportunity to learn*—creating equitable circumstances for meaningful participation in school and in the larger community (Moss et al., 2008). In ‘getting all students to the top of the mountain’ I explore the emergence of this vision at King as well as how the cultural practice of assessment at King has both been shaped by and been sustained by this vision. Additionally, I highlight how creating and sharing high-quality products and performances helped work toward the goal of engaging diverse, and historically underserved, students in academic work that matters.

#### The Role of Publicly Presenting Student Work

In the beginning of King’s turnaround, students’ work, produced with early implementing teachers, caused others to say in surprise, “You got *this* out of *that* group of kids?” The shift to believing that all students could produce high quality work—and developing school-wide instructional and cultural practices to foster this—evolved in part via the tangible evidence that showcased student achievement. In other words, the actual “hold in your hand” products of student work compelled others to believe in, and adopt the mission of, engaging all students in rigorous academics through learning expeditions. In describing early efforts to implement learning expeditions, McCarthy said, “Look at

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<sup>13</sup> Many people have used this phrase. For example, in a speech in April 2010, President Obama said the phrase; in July 2010 the Secretary of Education used the same wording.

the quality of work we got from *those kids*. We're getting it from everybody. Then it really sort of took off." The principal portrayed the shift saying that once they as a staff established that it was not acceptable to have only a subset of students doing high-quality work it was "...that moment where we decided that everybody's going to do this and we are going to display it publicly, and you better frickin' have your work done."

The *things* that students created and students' ability to be articulate about their work was a way to garner support from inside and outside King. In response to parents that questioned the rationale for de-tracking McCarthy said, "We're not hurting your kids. We're not hurting kids, we're helping them. Look at the work they can do. Watch how they talk about it." The tension between collectively raising achievement versus focusing on individual students is seen in the following excerpt from a parent's letter to the principal from 10/2/90, in which a mother expresses concern for the rigor of her daughter's education, which is seen as compromised by the emphasis placed on establishing community:

I am writing to express my concern about my sixth grade daughter's math class... I am concerned that she is not being challenged enough...I fully support "integrated classes"...What I object to is the response that the situation will be put on hold for another month, making it two full months into school before my daughter is tested and challenged to work up to her ability in math...we are anxious for [our daughter] to be challenged to her maximum ability and are pleased with the apparent concern for excellence exhibited by you and the teachers.

Products of student work—as well as live, in-person performances—raised interest and improved buy-in toward adopting innovative pedagogical structures. What was it about what students produced, and the students themselves, that attracted people's attention? How did seeing the tangible artifacts of teacher and student work shift peoples' understanding (both inside and outside of the school) about what was possible?



Embedded in the principal's above commentary is how publicly displaying work was a lever for improving the quality of curriculum and instruction. Also evident here is not just *seeing* high quality work, but seeing it from *all* students—even the poorer, minority one who had recently been in the school's lower tracks.

Here we begin to see how artifacts of student work historically acted as boundary objects, aiding in the transformation of not just King, but in people's understanding of this school. In early reform efforts, products of student work provided evidence of what diverse groups of students engaging in school looked like. In 1995, three years into the adoption of the Expeditionary Learning model, students at King produced a gateway product—participating in the previously learning expedition on the flora and fauna of Casco Bay. The quality of writing and artwork was unprecedented at King. When combined with the authenticity of the audience, the professional standards used (including data collection and means of publication), the kind of fieldwork (donning wetsuits and using snorkels) and working alongside local experts, this product told a powerful story of what was possible at King. (See Appendix E for a sample of student work from this product.)

During early efforts to implement learning expeditions it quickly became clear that students improved the quality of their work when their work was put in front of an audience. By generating audiences—and engaging audience members in the evaluative process—'putting your best foot forward' became the norm. A veteran teacher described audiences as a way to "raise the level of their production; [students] would really take ownership and...do their best work." As students started producing higher quality work, this teacher used "exemplars from the year before" to challenge students to do better. In

this sense, the artifacts of student work became boundary objects for future student work, translating meaning and distributing knowledge across time. Thus, ‘success bred success.’

### Doing Your Best Work

At King, there was emphasis on creating opportunities for students to do and share their best work. In summarizing the purpose of his job, a current teacher said that he tries “to create the situation where the kids are able to achieve their best work.” In this vein, a long-time teacher said,

I think for the kids, when the idea was ‘everyone gets over the bar’ like in Outward Bound...that whole idea of ‘success breeds success’, and if you can scaffold for kids and they can get there and they can feel that, then they’ll work with you the next time around.

In part, this quote describes the positive consequence of getting all students to produce high quality work—‘success breeds success’ speaks to how performing work that is high quality and that matters, incrementally shapes *each* student getting to the top of the mountain and how, perhaps, recognition fosters this progress.

Students were also encouraged to go ‘above and beyond’ the requirements of the regular curriculum. Extending learning always was an option, whether by being a voluntary member of media crew—a group of students who volunteered to create documentary films, blog entries and other media about their learning expeditions—or taking additional roles within an expedition (e.g., speaking to the mayor, special artwork for the cover of a final product). Students willingly stepped into these roles, relishing the opportunities. For example, although they did ‘extra work’ in media crew, students got no official credit. David asked students if this bothered them: they responded with the sentiment, “I love what I’m doing here—I’m not here for the credit.” The recognition that students received from their work superseded any desire for traditional ‘credit,’ showing

an example of how King’s culture of assessment spurred students’ participation in work that mattered to them, the school, and the community.

Given the demographic range at King—students whose families recently arrived from war-torn African countries to those who grew up in privileged, upper-middleclass families—not all students had the same technological know-how or skills necessary for effective academic communication. Therefore, King staff made efforts to ‘level the playing field,’ or, at least, help all students take advantage of the affordances offered. This aligns with the language of ‘opportunity to learn:’ helping students build a “set of capacities for action” so they could “take advantage of what is offered by the objects of features in the environment” (Gee, 2008, p. 81).

The classes students took at King in some ways patterned typical middle schools. However, King also had unique, home-grown courses—under the umbrella of Related Arts—that evolved out of a confluence of efforts to level the playing field and utilize individual teacher talents. Table 5 below, from King’s website, shows the progression of Related Arts classes at King.

Table 5

Related Arts Classes as Described on the King's Website

GRADE 6	Computers 2 trimesters	Students receive 2 trimesters of computer classes in grade 6, and project-based instruction in all 3 years at King.
	Music 1 trimester	Students receive 1 trimester of music class with the music teacher, who is available in the third trimester to support projects. Orchestra, band, and chorus are available to all grades.
GRADE 7	Art 1 semester	The art teacher joins each seventh grade house for alternating semesters to teach art and support expeditions.
	Scientific Communications 1 semester	Students explore systems of information and develop techniques for interpreting, organizing, and communicating data in electronic media.
GRADE 8	Technology Education 1 semester	Students actively engage in "hands-on/minds-on" learning, designing and creating 3D solutions to real problems.
	World Cultures 1 semester	A combination of culinary arts and career exploration, students explore culture through cooking and make plans for their future.

A specific example of how Related Arts classes created affordances for learning is that all 7<sup>th</sup> graders took Scientific Communications for one semester. This class combined supporting the science curriculum with boosting students' use of technology to coalesce and present their work. Ultimately, this class helped students develop and use tools and resources necessary to produce and present high quality work within learning expeditions.

In a second example, 6<sup>th</sup> grade music was designed to be accessible to all students, regardless of musical background. The music teacher said,

The digital technology [used in this class] evens the playing field... kids are able to compose interesting music and that has their own style...they don't have to read music. They don't have to be able to play an instrument.

Conscious effort to 'even the playing field' was a way of performing school at King.

Expecting and supporting high-quality work from all students was also evident in the result of all learning expeditions: producing final products and performances that represented the work of the house while also showcasing individual achievement. As stated in the school's expedition planning rubric, teachers strove for a final product "that requires each student to create representations of the targeted knowledge and skills." This allowed for differentiation: each student could work to the best of his ability; however, the *collective* final product showed a range of all students' accomplishments. For example, at culminating events – the final performance of an expedition - all students had a role, though not all students were responsible in the same way or for the same content. For example, at the Small Acts of Courage culminating event, each student had an on-stage speaking role, though some students additionally were announcers, greeters, singers, and/or technology producers.

### Upsetting the Ruts

From the beginning of King's reform efforts, McCarthy believed that new approaches to instruction and staff collaboration were critical to implementing and sustaining the vision of a de-tracked school. Having heterogeneously-grouped classrooms meant adopting radically different teaching strategies and fostering new school-culture dynamics. He called the process of adopting new school-wide instructional approaches and collaboration initiatives, "upsetting the ruts." Directed attempts to 'upset the ruts' of the status quo, pin points King's catalytic efforts to change the cultural practice of assessment.

In describing the change not just from tracked to untracked, but also to teaching through learning expeditions, one long-term teacher said he went from, "How am I going

to get everything covered from September to June?” to “Where do I utilize my energy that’s best going to help the kids?” His shift signifies a radical change in how he viewed the purpose of his teaching: from ‘coverage for the sake of coverage’ to student learning. Upsetting long-standing practices and beliefs about teaching caused some teachers to fight to stay in their respective ruts, others to leave King, while the majority ‘tinkered toward reform’ (Tyak & Cuban, 1995). Every step out of the historical ruts shaped the emerging cultural practice of assessment.

Implementing major reforms also involved upsetting the ruts of teacher-to-teacher interactions. Concerted effort was made to open communicative channels, foster collaboration and deal with conflict. Although I talk more about a culture of collaboration in Chapter 8, it was critical throughout the early stages of implementation to not just get buy-in for the vision of school change, but also to engage staff in the *process* of deciding how to upset the ruts.

### Favoring King’s Capable

An inherent tension in ‘getting all students to the top of the mountain’ was getting equal representation of all members of the student body successfully involved in all areas of the school. Although great strides were made in equalizing learning opportunities at King, the privilege of a White, middleclass upbringing was inescapable. Simply making experiences ‘available’ to all students was not always enough, since not all students were equally ready to take advantage of the resources. In this sense, sometimes, despite best efforts, King favored more ‘capable’ students. As has been true throughout 23 years of reform, there was a deeply held belief at King that the appearance of capability did not always accurately reflect a student’s true ability to perform. Thus, the challenge was

encouraging a diverse range of students to participate and take advantage of all that King had to offer.

This tension was evident in, though was actively mitigated, media crew. For example, at one 6<sup>th</sup> grade's media crew's inaugural session, one girl came in with her own digital camera; another girl said twice, "My mom used to be a photographer;" and one boy said, "Are we going to use the newer version of iMovie?" These students entered with a level of readiness and were attracted to media crew, in part, because of their home environments. Because the composition of media crew was mostly determined by those who voluntarily completed an application, those with pre-given motivation were drawn to media crew. This seemed to cause the make up of media crew to be disproportionately comprised of White, middleclass students. David and other teachers made concerted efforts to encourage specific students to volunteer, students they thought would benefit from the experience. The composition of student backgrounds became more diverse because of these efforts.

Another factor that favored King's capable, was the "rush, rush, rush" way of doing things, that privileged students who could work under pressure—or students who, as one teacher put it, could "get right to work." Although working under publishing and performance deadlines was exciting and engaging for many, to some this presented a constraint, not an affordance for, learning. Thus, here lies a tension: how to simultaneously prepare some students to get to the starting line while propelling those who are ready to continue and excel?

In a different way, 'capable' may still mean White, middle-class students: different cultural backgrounds created barriers to the participation of all students. For

example, the music teacher expressed one of the dilemmas he faced around participation at musical performances:

[Students] don't always have transportation and frankly some of the Muslim kids, their parents don't actually want them to be in performances. There's a lot of those type of issues that are always a challenge. I've thought of maybe we can get a bus to come and bring kids to concerts and haven't quite made that happen. But in the early stages, before I had my own family, I'd be driving kids to concerts and picking them up and dropping them off after to just get them here. But, I don't do that anymore.

The important task of 'leveling the playing field' bumps up against individualized success in the context of a collaborative culture. How to 'close the achievement gap' while also allowing each student to do their best work?

### Summary

In some ways, the historical shift from a tracked to untracked school involved a re-prioritization of *all* students' learning; not just that of the higher tracks. Although the emphasis was student learning, there was a caring for the diverse, collective student body. A shift in what was possible took place, fueled by 'making student work public.' Performing student work and putting student-created artifacts in front of audiences quickly shaped the recognition King received, which in turn generated higher quality products and performances. Major changes to the cultural practice of assessment at King were in part instigated by the historical need to show progress and gain support—to not just say the goal was to 'get all students to the top of the mountain'—but to demonstrate evidence of this. The cultural practice of assessment also began to shift because of the type of reform being implemented (i.e., learning expeditions) and the way that reforms were enacted (i.e., through a collaborative approach among staff).



In the following interlude, I begin a finer-grained look at one student's journey in the Small Acts of Courage expedition. Michael's story represents him doing his best work and participating in work that matters to him, his teachers, his school and the community. Michael's journey could be considered 'getting one student to the top of the mountain;' however, it also conveys the pervasive challenge of overcoming personal/historical/social/cultural legacies of what Wortham (2006) calls 'unpromising boys.' Wortham argues, along with others, that African American boys are stereotyped into a habitual form of performing school, in which their academic and social identities are wrapped up in a cycle of low achievement and low expectations. Michael is an example of overcoming this identity—at least for this expedition.

### Interlude #1: Michael's Participation in Small Acts of Courage

In this interlude I begin sharing 'stories worth telling' about Michael and about the Small Acts of Courage expedition. Specifically, I describe Michael's broad participation, exemplifying his engagement in whole-class, small-group and independent work. Although the story of *one* student, the complexities of Michael's notable engagement represent the challenges of successfully navigating tensions between various ideologies, models, and timescales of reform. In the examples that follow, I highlight how King, and the cultural practice of assessment, engages children from diverse backgrounds, while helping individual students care about, and achieve, academic excellence.

Michael's participation in Small Act—from his and his teachers' perspective—was different than in his three previous expeditions. Something was unique about the convergence of the content, assignments, and social configuration of the class that engaged Michael more than in other expeditions. To unravel these complexities, I start by sharing what his participation looked like in the classroom.

#### Whole-class Discussions

Michael often contributed to whole-class discussions— he was typically one of the first to raise his hand and sometimes was one of the only. Michael's hand was up so much during whole-class sessions that on several occasions Caitlin said, "Let's not let Michael do all of the work for us here." More specifically, Michael's hand was up almost all of the time during the 'building background knowledge' phase of this expedition, when Caitlin reviewed events, concepts and people from the Civil Rights Movement. For example, when Caitlin asked near the beginning of the expedition, "What was the goal of

the Civil Rights Movement”—Michael’s hand immediately went up and, when called on, answered, “Equal rights for all.” Later that same day, after watching a clip of the civil rights movie *Eyes on the Prize*, Caitlin asked, “Any aha’s, any surprises, questions, what do you think?” Michael again was the first to respond saying, “I found a quote that kind of sums up the hope [people felt] —‘We wanted something for ourselves and our children.’”

Michael also frequently offered more analytic commentary related to the Civil Rights Movement: his comments and questions were probing, building off of what either Caitlin or other students said. For example, when analyzing their predictions about reactions to the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling, in which the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ was struck down, Caitlin asked students to share things that surprised them. Michael responded, “Well some people were in disbelief...they didn’t really believe that they would have to integrate.” This led to a back and forth between students about what ‘resisters’ felt when faced with the reality of this Supreme Court ruling.

Michael’s active participation in these question-answer sessions demonstrates his understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the content of this expedition on the Civil Rights Movement. His, and several other students’ participation in these whole-class discussions, formed the heart of large class conversations, energizing many others to share thoughts and questions.

#### Small Group Work

In addition to participating in whole-class formats, Michael also contributed to small group collaborative work; however, unlike his involvement in whole-class

discussions, his participation in these sessions was often a steady combination of academic work and socializing with peers. It is difficult, and perhaps unnecessary, to differentiate between Michaels' social and academic participation. Wortham (2006) sees both social and academic identity as being constituted by the other— and that one cannot legitimately be separated from the other. Although I do not specifically address the development of Michael's *identity*, it is interesting to note the extent of Michael's dialogue that continuously fluctuated among multiply focused engagements and seeing how this seemed to create affordances and constraints to his 'performing school.'

In particular, Michael's small group work was often supported by his friendship with Faith. Since first grade, these two had both a social and an academic relationship; when they were in a group together, they often had an ongoing exchange that was one part academic work, one part humorous pokes at each other. The following two exchanges exemplify their small group interactions. In the first, as they looked through historical photographs on a fieldwork day at the special collections library at the local university, Michael teased Faith about her middle name:

Michael – [while looking at a photograph] Faith *Stevens* Thayer...Is your middle name Stevens?

Faith – What?

Michael – Is your middle name Stevens? I'm going to call you that, "Steven."

Faith – I knew you were going to say that.

Later in the expedition, as students prepared for their interviews, Faith helped Michael grasp the overall purpose of the interviews.

Michael – Which page?

Faith - Under "Small Acts of Courage" there's - No wait, under "civil rights" –

Michael - Gerald Talbot.

Faith - No. Under civil rights research I would take "Local NAACP."

Michael - Or if you were smart like Michael, you'd do this.

Faith - Yeah but we don't need to know about him, we are going to learn about him.

Michael - Exactly. I just learned like a whole bunch of junk about him.

Faith - You don't want to learn about him. You want to learn about him when we interview him. Not –

Michael - Ohhh, I gotchu.

Faith – Yeah, that's the point of the interview.

Michael – Oh, yeah. So not about Gerald Talbot. About Gerald Talbot's part in the civil rights movement. Ahh...

During many small group exchanges, Michael appeared as if he was more going along with other students, allowing students like Faith to contribute to the groups' progress. However, as the interview approached, Faith was out sick. In her absence Michael was notably more involved in managing the group, contributing to both the content and organization of the interview. He volunteered to type up the interview questions, engaged directly with a student teacher who helped them practice their interview, and participated in a lengthy conversation with group mates about the function of follow-up questions. Also, as they finalized the order of their questions, Michael said:

Our second to last question is, 'What were your responsibilities as the president of the Portland branch of the NAACP?' But we asked him why he became involved in the NAACP – I think we should put that behind, because it's like we went to a different subject and then we went back to the NAACP thing.

### Independent Work

The work Michael did on his own ranged from in-depth focus to lackadaisical attention. Many of his smaller assignments were not turned in on time, were lost, or were messy. Caitlin often gently reprimanded Michael's lack of organization. What follows is a typical exchange:

Caitlin - Can you guys have your timelines out for me.

Faith – Mines out.

Michael – I didn't finish my timeline. I didn't finish my timeline.

Caitlin – OK. That isn't going in as a grade, so that needs to be a priority today. OK, Michael?

Can I see how much you've got done?

Michael – [Searching through his belongings]

Caitlin – It's really important that you don't fall behind. OK?

Michael – Hmm mmm.

Caitlin – And, it would be much better if we were organized. What are you doing during Supervised Study today?

Michael – Nothing.

Caitlin – Can you come in my room?

Michael – Yeah.

Caitlin – And maybe work on getting organized?

Michael – [mumbles something]

Despite sometimes doing work without enthusiasm (sometimes late, incomplete, missing or disorganized work) Michael labored over his interview. After the written narratives were finished, but before the culminating event, he said:

I worked really hard on this story. We did the interview and we recorded it. And I probably listened to mine 50...I listened to mine a lot of times. Because sometimes I needed quotes and other times he might have said something I didn't understand. So I went back ... and listened and I still didn't understand so I had to go way back and listen to what he was saying leading up to that message. So, yeah, I feel like I worked on it hard.

Michael also discussed the specific aspects of what was challenging to him:

The biggest challenge for me was kind of dissecting the interview and like 'cause he talked about a lot of stuff in the interview, but we had to pick out...eight main topics that he talked about and put them into paragraphs. I think that was hard because he had a lot to talk about and every single thing he said was really important. I had to drop some stuff that was not so important that was still were actually important.

These two quotes characterize the attention and energy Michael placed on turning the interview with Gerald Talbot into a written narrative. Michael was engaged in the process

of getting the story right. He was committed not just for the sake of presenting the story back to Gerald Talbot, but to the larger goal of telling other people about his story. See Appendix H for the final version of Michael's written narrative.

### Summary

Michael's participation throughout this expedition was strong—stronger than those that came before, as well as the two that followed in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. What was different about the Small Acts of Courage expedition? What shaped his participation? And, what cultural practices of assessment at King supported these shapers of engagement? By characterizing and analyzing aspects of Michael's participation we are offered a view into one student's story of producing work that matters and of rigorously engaging in academic work.

More specifically, in the above examples there is a shift in the quality of Michael's engagement, which seems to depend on what he is producing. When his academic labor turns away from more routine school-like tasks and toward producing a written narrative about a real person's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, Michael's efforts shift—he is invested in getting it right and he wants to tell the story well. It seems that although Michael had some inherent interest in history and civil rights, it was not until he started producing work that mattered (to him, to the community) that his participation became exemplary.

This interlude sets the stage for a more refined look, in upcoming interludes, at the aspects of this expedition that were compelling to Michael and some of the persistent challenges Michael faced as he continued his academic career at King.

## Telling the Story

At King, telling stories formed the heart of ‘making work public’ and the cultural practice of assessment. The idea of ‘telling the story’ pervaded King: from purposely telling King’s story (i.e., the ‘good news’ about King), to working with students to ‘tell the story of their learning,’ to sometimes being the center of academic work (i.e., ‘telling other people’s stories’ in Small Acts of Courage). Because there are stories worth telling at King *and* because King has a history of telling these stories, this theme gets to the core of what shapes, and is shaped by, the cultural practice of assessment. Here, including the interlude that follows, we see what the inner workings of ‘making work public’ looks like across different grain sizes and timescales.

The theme ‘telling the story’ is comprised of multiple, overlapping processes. Students at King were asked to ‘tell the story of their learning’ to deepen their understanding of academic content *through* the telling. ‘Telling the story’ was also about students sharing their learning with outside audiences. By intentionally showcasing what happened at King, through telling stories, the school has attracted attention locally, nationally and internationally. Through, and because of, this process King has become an open-door school.

### Telling the (his)Story of King

King participated robustly in telling its story. Here I do not recount all of the stories that King, and others, have told, but instead discuss *how* and *why* these stories were intentionally shared. For example, King’s telling its own stories created opportunities: sharing the positive aspects of teaching, learning and student engagement, brought the school unprecedented recognition, which in turn afforded King a certain



amount of protection from prescriptive district reforms. King, despite the landscape of mandated accountability measures and consequences, was continually bolstered by this recognition, creating a barrier between it and intervention from outside ‘reform’ efforts.

Telling King’s story was deliberate. McCarthy knew from the beginning of reform efforts that he was taking huge risks in attempting whole-school transformation and that he had to make the emerging positive results public:

There was a survival portion...King had a very negative reputation, parents didn’t want to go here...People should be proud of the school that’s in their neighborhood. That’s part of telling the story. I took a lot of criticism on the elimination of tracking. Once you got some results, and expeditions started coming forward, we needed to get that story out. It was a necessity...it was partially survival and proving to people.

As McCarthy said, he intentionally told the story of student learning as an antidote to the criticism that he and others received as they worked to eliminate tracking.

King’s story was often told starting in 1988 at the beginning of King’s “McCarthy Era.” The ‘untracking of King’ was used narratively by staff to describe the upheaval that took place during the 1990s. The school, during this time, was thought to be a ‘battleground.’ A specific aspect of this discourse was the acrimonious nature of the staff during the initial transition period from a tracked to an untracked school. This period, which lasted several years, included the introduction and adoption of Expeditionary Learning. David said that the school was a “genuine battle” during this time period. David attributed the staying power of McCarthy and the overall sticking-with-it-ness of the school to how King’s transformational efforts survived during this tumultuous period.

McCarthy said that when he arrived at King in 1988 the school was “awful” with a “lack of professionalism among staff; kids running wild—literally, running wild in the building.” He also described staff as “adults using 8<sup>th</sup> grade behaviors.” A long time

teacher at King used the analogy “turning the battleship” to describe the slow process of change during this period—that at any one moment you might not have been able to see the change, but that the very slow process was indeed happening.

Students, as part of their academic work, also made use of King’s transformation story. In two recent expeditions—Small Acts of Courage and a 6<sup>th</sup> grade expedition in the Fall of 2010 called The Faces of King—the story of King engaged students in the content of their expedition: the former as an analogy between discrimination and segregation and King’s history; the latter to introduce students to their school’s history. In both cases, the principal led students through a simulation of the inequitable treatment of students under tracking, the general disregard for teaching and learning, and the unsafe environment for both students and teachers.<sup>14</sup> This narrative—of the principal telling this story—also was used in students’ keynote address at the National Expeditionary Learning conference, serving double duty to both describe part of the Small Acts expedition and to tell the audience about King. King’s history during the ‘age of transformation’ thus became a powerful student discourse, one they took up and perpetuated.

### The Ultimate Canvas

Figure 5

The ‘banner’ from King’s website, depicting two students’ rendition of the front of the school (along with self-portraits of the student artists)



<sup>14</sup> See <http://staff.portlandschools.org/kmsweb/share/blogmedia/y1/FacesofKing10/> for a student-made documentary about this simulation from the Faces of King expedition. (Click on the “McCarthy on King” link).

One way that ‘telling the story’ happened at King was through the school’s extensive website. What has been called a ‘digital footprint,’ a school’s website has the potential to convey a detailed story about a school and their accomplishments (Vaznis, 2011, June 3). With the proliferation of on-line technology, the web has become a vehicle for some schools to make their work public. In what follows, I share *how* King’s website was used to tell stories.

Since gaining control of their website and shared servers from the district in 2005, David has had the authority and tools to represent King digitally in the way he and others wanted. Maximizing the potential of the web, both for student learning and to share information about King, was what David called, “waking up and smelling the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” To not use this resource well—or not to use it all—was absurd.

King’s website was unlike many public school websites. It hosted basic information about King, including the school schedule, division of houses, curriculum, and community partnerships. The site was also dedicated to showcasing current and past learning expeditions, through the perspective, and work of, students. King’s website included:

- *News From the Blog* – Student-written entries about current happenings from expeditions. Students in media crew wrote, and sometimes produced short videos of “the latest news” from their grade/house.
- *King TV* – A section that housed expedition videos, media, and independent student projects from current and past expeditions, going back to 2000.
- *On Expedition* – Overlapping with the above sections, this section showcased all things to do with each current expedition happening at King. This was also an archival resource to past expeditions.

Additionally, King’s website highlighted current happenings, including upcoming events; teachers and students in the news; and awards given to students, teachers or the school.

Recent examples of featured awards include the school's librarian receiving the national Carnegie Corporation/New York Times "I Love My Librarian" award, an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student being one of two Maine state honorees for the Prudential Spirit of Community Award, and McCarthy receiving the 2010 Maine Principal of the Year award.

David referred to the web as "the ultimate canvas for publishing student work:" the stories students told, through the media they produced, had a 'place to go'—that any and all work could be shared with a web-based audience. Also, the web is 'ultimate' because of the speed, the ease of use, and the audience. David emphasized the benefit of not *just* publishing student work, but using the web for this. The web also functioned as a 'last resort'—if a student's product, a movie for example, was not finished in time for a Culminating Event, at least the work, when finished, could be uploaded to the website. This did not imply a 'booby prize;' it was still a viable publishing option—just not *as good* as also having it ready for the intended event.

Using the website to tell stories bridges two emerging themes—publishing student work and intentionally garnering support from outside audiences. Despite the benefits, the web was not always conducive to the school's goals: the audience was largely unknown and thus feedback from viewers was not always direct or apparent. Also, because the format was not a 'hold in your hands' artifact, the usability of the web was potentially less tangible than a book.

Using the web to tell stories highlights the intentionality and innovation behind sharing what happened at King. Showcasing student work via the website provided a critical link to the outside world, digitally perforating what Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) call the 'hermetic seal' typical of many schools. By opening up the school to

worldwide viewers, King invited a certain kind of assessment that was inherent in witnessing student work this way.

### Students Telling the Story

At King, students were encouraged to tell their story of learning, of their process of learning expeditions, and the story of their school. Although evident in many aspects of the school, much of this work was done through media crew. During each expedition, teams of students worked with David to document the process and product of their academic endeavors. Students who applied, and then were selected, attended their media crew class, in groups of eight to 12, several times a week. Students were responsible for capturing and telling stories about their expedition. To convey the purpose of students' roles, David told them it was not about "making what you want" but about "telling the learning story." Students' efforts were a form of service to their house and school.

Media crew students told stories by writing and posting on their house's blog; students "kept track of the story"—the smaller day-to-day happenings as well as the whole story of the expedition. Students also "put pieces together" from their current expedition into a coherent story, often by creating short documentary movies. Students, under David's tutelage, were responsible for all aspects of video production.

Another critical aspect of 'students telling the story' was that students were taught and then utilized *professional conventions*. David often compared their work to that of experts, saying to students that producing an effective story hinged on their use of professional standards to capture and tell the story. For example, he taught them the importance of having "good shots" and "cutting on action." During one media crew session, he said to them, "amateurs don't know all the secrets." Using conventions would

help students create stories that would be ‘watchable’ by an audience – what they produced would pull people in and make the audience interested. Without a ‘watchable’ story, students would not actually have a story worth telling.

David modeled aspects of capturing and telling the story using professional conventions, including “how to get the five shots” with a video camera (e.g., the establishing shot, the cut away shot). David also worked with small parts of students’ movies as they progressed from raw footage to final documentary, showing them how to make edits that followed professional standards: he would show them how and why he might make a change and then ‘undo’ his work so they could make the move themselves, if they chose to.

The use of professional conventions hooked students’ interest, shaping their participation by elevating student work to ‘the work of professionals.’ Here we see a link between students performing the role of a professional and how stories about King were told. In this case, performing school takes on an interesting quality: in using professional standards students played the role of professional journalist/story teller/writer/videographer giving them the opportunity to ‘stand a head taller’ while simultaneously showcasing King’s story.

Sometimes the content of an expedition compelled students to capture and tell a particular *academic* story. For example, students, for one of their expeditions learned about interviewing from professional journalists. Students were instructed that, “you have to *get* the story to *tell* the story” and that there were different skills involved in “getting the story” and in “telling the story.” This was also true in Small Acts of Courage: students focused for much of the expedition on “getting the story;” they then spent

considerable time “telling the story,” including writing narratives, preparing for the culminating event, and performing the culminating event.

*Which* students were doing the telling was important to David and others at King. At the end of one media crew session he said, referring to a specific group of girls, “We need *them* telling the story,” referring to working with four Muslim girls on their video-production skills. Why does *who* is telling the story matter? How does the story change as the tellers change? In another media crew session, David said to two White girls as they worked on their video, “Remember we want to get all sorts of kids on video—not just White kids.” These were efforts to accurately represent King’s cultural and ethnic diversity—to show the outside world (and to themselves as well) that this successful school was comprised of all sorts of students.

As David noted to students and teachers, it was sometimes challenging to effectively tell the story of students’ learning. Occasionally, students ran into the related problems of either having no story of learning to tell, or that the story they were trying to tell was quite weak. David described an expedition in which media crew members interviewed fellow students about their experiences and subsequently created an “embarrassing video of kids trying to make connections.” This was a critique of the quality of some expeditions—that not all expeditions equally engaged students in compelling activities and rigorous learning. In a related example, at the end of a learning expedition, students struggled to tell the story because the components of the expedition were not clearly definable; David said that the process and learning of this expedition had *historically* been hard to capture (i.e., long stretches of seat work and/or students working independently on disconnected tasks). Both of these cases relate to the upcoming theme

‘using the developmental approach’ in that teachers and school leaders continuously worked to define what exemplary expeditionary practices were, as well as how to implement them.

### Capturing the Process

At King, emphasis was on not just telling the story of the *end* result, but also documenting the *trajectory* of that learning during an expedition. Culminating products—as well as other summative results such as letter grades and test scores - focused on outcome and output, inherently leaving out the finer-grained details of the story. David repeatedly emphasized the importance of telling the “little stories of learning along the way;” that the story of learning was not told only through the final product. More specifically, to accurately tell the story of an expedition, it was important to capture the skills and knowledge students developed and used along the way; the story *of learning* existed in the process rather than in what was demonstrated at the end. Here there is a clear connection between specific classroom assessment strategies and the overall culture of assessment at King: the formative assessment practices used by teachers helped keep track of students’ progress, rather than simply expecting to see learning demonstrated in the final product.

David often focused on ‘capturing the process’—if you didn’t capture the *process* then there was no story to tell. This notion, in turn, had a prescriptive effect on the components of a learning expedition—not all aspects of an expedition could be captured because they were too obtuse to be part of an interesting story. Similarly, teachers also got hooked into “getting good video,” i.e., capturing the story, though their reasons were sometimes different from David’s. For example, David always came back to student



learning—either showing learning through the story or students learning by capturing and telling the story. Teachers on the other hand, were sometimes alternatively focused on capturing the activity.

At King, specific school-wide assessment practices helped not just ‘tell the story,’ but specifically to ‘tell the story’ of learning along the way. For example, the use of portfolios in all grades helped students both capture and narrate the story of their learning. Students put examples of their work in their portfolio and then used their portfolios in student-led conferences as fodder for a three-way dialogue between student, family member and teacher. This was another of the many ways that ‘telling the story’ was connected to specific assessment practices at King.

### Summary

Two key factors are important: (1) That King *had* stories, big and small, that were worth telling; and (2) that King intentionally and robustly told these stories. Although student work was at the heart of the stories, how and why King told these stories helps illuminate the cultural practice of assessment and the dilemmas this school faced. For example, King proactively defended itself against disbelievers by sharing well-chosen stories about students – ones that showcased diverse groups of students engaged in rigorous academic work. Students also benefited from being the ones to tell the story and from having *their* story told: knowing that their story was worth telling generated their own participation in academic tasks and procured recognition through outside audiences. Here we see the synergistic relationship between students’ participation, the public performance of student work, audiences and the accompanying recognition that befalls students.

In the current era of standards and accountability, public schools are required to show evidence of academic achievement. King demonstrated agency by expanding local understanding of what counts as evidence, by sharing evidence of learning through telling the story of King in visually compelling ways – in addition to the required publicizing of standardized test scores. However, in a very different way than most schools, test scores were also used to tell King’s story. Although standardized testing was not widely embraced philosophically among staff, the desire to do well on the tests was strong – good test scores, in turn, were used to bolster the argument for staying the course at King by being able to say “what we do works.” (See also how test scores foster ‘being peered into’ in the upcoming section.) That King told its own stories, through public performances of student work, demonstrates their homegrown combination of institutional agency and leveraging of student work as boundary objects.

## Interlude #2: Telling the Story of the Civil Rights Movement

Given the school-wide emphasis on ‘telling the story,’ there are similarities in how students told stories within Small Acts of Courage and King’s history of ‘telling the story.’ In particular, describing and analyzing how Michael resonated with telling untold stories is a way to explore what was compelling to him about this expedition.

When asked on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010, “What motivated you to work hard on the project?”

Michael responded:

Well, I felt like their story needed to be heard. Because there was a lot of information, old stories and a lot of stuff that most of us didn’t know. I felt like if I did a good enough job other people would look ‘cause we are sending this out into the public. They will look at it and they will know the story and they will know that it wasn’t just Martin Luther King Jr.... that Gerald Talbot and other people played a part in civil rights, too.

For Michael, it wasn’t just that he created a written narrative about Gerald Talbot (though this in itself was important), but that he also was ‘sending this out into the public.’ This public telling of stories and of having an audience for his work was evident in the way Michael described his engagement.

When asked six months after the end of the expedition what he remembered most about Small Acts of Courage, Michael recounted what it was about *these* particular stories that were important to him—both that these were stories that had not been told (unlike civil rights legends) and that the people in these stories made small, but critical, contributions to the attaining of civil rights. He said:

Meeting figures that paved the way for equal rights and learning about something, like, we could of just did... an ‘acts of courage’ on Martin Luther King or Malcolm X but everyone knows them. But we focused on people who helped but weren’t really named and their small acts put us where we are today. And it was cool and we also got to meet them... And, their small acts and, like, I’m not saying what Martin Luther King wasn’t important, I’m saying that it was

important, but other people, they were just as important but not named and they helped us get to where we are today.

It is also important that Michael actually met his interviewee through his in-person interview and thus began a personal relationship with Gerald Talbot (the specifics of which will be discussed in Interlude #3).

Although Michael was enthusiastic about telling the stories of anyone who made a difference during the civil rights era, he was particularly compelled to tell Gerald Talbot's story. Although Mr. Talbot's story would be intriguing to most, Michael articulated why *to him* his story was worth telling. On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2011, I asked him to describe a one-minute exchange captured on his digital audio recorder between him and his group mates during their prep work for their interview. The students were using the book, *Maine's Visible Black History: The Chronicle of its People* for their research.

Below is their exchange as they looked at a specific picture in the book:

Faith: That's one of him.

Caitlin: Here he is when they signed the Fair Housing Bill in 1965.

Faith: That's in here.

Michael: Which one is he?

Caitlin: He's the –

Michael: He's the last one, right? [overlapping with Caitlin]

Caitlin: Here?

Michael and Faith: That's him!

Michael: Wow.

Faith: Wow.

Caitlin: Yup. He's very –

Faith: When he said he was –

Caitlin: He's very light –

Michael: Yeah.

Faith: Yeah.

Caitlin: Very light skinned.

Faith: Like in the Plessy vs. Ferguson –

Caitlin: Yeah. Um...

[turning pages for 7 seconds]

Faith: That's him.

Michael: Yeah, I know it.

Faith: [says something I can't understand]

Caitlin: There's one...I guess they didn't give it to me.

Michael: Now he's darker.

Caitlin: But where I think it was him coming back from after the March on Washington.

Faith: Ohh, was it that one?

Caitlin: Yeah, that's, so...yeah this is – I think that's him.

In describing this exchange, Michael first said:

We did know that he was light skinned because Mrs. LeClair told us, but the picture that I was just talking about - they were in a court room and there's one person sitting down—a White male with glasses – and there's pictures on the table and there's some guys around...One was pretty light skinned but you could still tell he was African American— that's who we thought [Gerald Talbot] was, but he was even more light skinned than that guy, so we thought he was actually White, so it was pretty like weird.

Then, in response to my asking about how Gerald Talbot having light skin shaped his own feelings about Mr. Talbot, Michael said:

Well, I don't really know. But the thing is that he could have – one of the reasons I find him so inspiring - he could have passed for a White guy. He could have said, "I am White, I can sit in the front." But he decided to stay with his African American wife and be treated as an African American, so that's one of the reasons I find him so inspiring.

In addition to having compelling reasons to tell Mr. Talbot's story, Michael was also clearly moved by the appreciation conveyed by the interviewees that students were capturing and telling their stories. Michael said:

I think they really appreciated what we did. We took time...to write and interview and learn about their stories—stories that most people don't know about and I think they were proud of everyone...Just to know that they appreciated what we did.

And knowing that they helped us - they helped change the way things were...to make it better now. And, knowing that they appreciated what we're doing and they know that we appreciate what they did for us is very inspiring.

Michael said that he knew their work was appreciated by the interviewees. This sense of recognition—and the connections because of the content of their academic explorations of the Civil Rights Movement—elevates the purpose of ‘telling stories’ and highlights the reciprocal nature of students doing something for community members while being acknowledged for their efforts. Both student and interviewee benefit from this type of academic work.

In relation to a previous expedition called Soil Superheroes, Michael said the following about Small Acts of Courage, further deepening the sense of reciprocal caring:

It was different...I did it and I had fun but it wasn't really, like, I don't know – most of the stuff I learned there I forgot, because it wasn't really engaging, but I like history and the Small Acts of Courage it was more like I really cared about what I was learning. And almost all of what I learned I haven't forgotten. And those moments I haven't forgot.

### Summary

By exploring the reasons Michael was so excited about this expedition, some of the compelling features of this expedition are foregrounded. For example, it was important that students were telling stories of people in the local Portland community—meaning that Michael was able to meet (and later befriend) a *local* legend. Also, the audience for student work was in part ‘baked in’ to the infrastructure of this expedition: the people who sacrificed to ‘help make things better today’ were the ones who witnessed students’ work, had a stake in what students said, and benefited from student efforts.

How does the way the larger King community invoked ‘telling the story’ map on (or not) to Michael’s experience? First, it was through purposefully sharing stories about

King that individuals, groups and the school-as-a-whole got recognized for their work. To tell a story presumes an audience—and when that audience has a stake in the outcome of the story the interaction between the storytellers and the audience becomes less abstract. This happens at the school level, but also clearly at the individual student level. Second, Michael is invested in getting the story ‘out there,’ sharing it with people who have not yet learned about Gerald Talbot’s contribution. This sense of being inspired – of utilizing agency to share stories—maps nicely onto King’s motivated efforts to ‘get it out there.’ Finally, relationships are central to both the finer-grained view of one student, as well as the larger-grained view of the school: both levels of ‘telling the story’ build and connect people from different social worlds, forging relationships and new lines of communication.

## CHAPTER 7

### MAKING WORK FOR SOMEONE

In this chapter I present two themes: (1) Being peered into; and (2) Performing student work. Although both themes resonate throughout my theory building, here I trace the development of each process and show how each substantially constitutes the other. In other words, I demonstrate how ‘being peered into’ happened at King because students publicly performed their work and how students participated in academics because their work was peered into. Throughout both categories, an understanding of the higher-level themes recognition and audience continue to emerge.

#### Being Peered Into

At the heart of making work public and King intentionally ‘telling the story’ was the related process of ‘being peered into.’ Unlike simply having an audience, ‘being peered into’ implies a layer of scrutiny regarding who is doing the peering, why the peering is happening, and the convergence of both dealing with and promoting ‘peering into’ at King. By sharing the different ways that peering into occurred - by people within and outside of King—I show that students and teachers went about the business of ‘performing school’ in a remarkably different way than most schools. Because the-school-as-a-whole, as well as individual and collective students and teachers, got recognized, King was ‘peered into;’ or, said differently, it was *through* and *because of* this kind of ‘peering into’ that King was recognized. In this section, I illustrate how



‘being peered into’ transformed King over time. I also explore the tensions that arose when a school-as-a-whole, teachers and students were peered into.

The theme ‘being peered into’ also reflects the current tenor within public schools – schools and teachers are under intense scrutiny to ‘close the achievement gap’ through one primary means: raising test scores. Teachers in public schools are being peered into in historically new ways, with classroom-based test scores made public and used to ‘hold teachers accountable’ for student achievement (i.e., Race to the Top requirements that states adopt teacher evaluation systems based on test scores). Part of what is astounding is that King has intentionally turned ‘being peered into’ into a productive form of recognition; and, it has become the norm. Over the last 23 years, King has transformed itself, by increasingly making student and teacher work public, from what Lortie, in his 1975 classic, *Schoolteacher*, called the ‘egg carton’ phenomena of schools—each teacher in her own room teaching behind closed doors. A teacher at King since the late 1980s said,

Think of how our jobs are getting more and more public...one of the interesting things in the district and in the national picture is, we [at King] have been forced to make our work more public sooner and so we’re not freaking out. But some people are. It has been a “close your door - do your own thing” profession and so that tension that other schools, or other districts are having - I don’t feel that, because we’re past that.

This sense of normalcy was not just a way to hold teachers accountable in the current ‘measure and punish’ climate that sometimes promotes a feeling of victimization among teachers and schools, but instead generated collegiality and professionalism among King staff. Thus, King’s agency regarding ‘being peered into’ both created a particular cultural practice of assessment while shaping the ways ‘being peered into’ was fostered.

### Fostering the Peering Into

As shown, King has a history of intentionally telling its story. Over the last 23 years, by telling the ‘good news’ about King, the school has generated considerable attention. Unlike many, King became a school that diligently and proactively shared what happened at the school. The forward, positive momentum of King’s recognition has carried the school through even challenging moments.

Since 1998, King’s test scores have steadily increased, outpacing city and state averages in both reading and math. In presenting King to outside visitors, David said that test scores “are why we get so many people in the door:” good test scores facilitated people’s interest in King. King also purposely used these scores (as does Expeditionary Learning) to ‘tell the story’ of King. As mentioned earlier, a tension exists between being unaligned with the overall ‘regime of testing’ while also using test scores as a way to say, “Hey, look at us! What we do works.” In other words, while adhering to state test-administration guidelines, King purposefully leveraged rising test scores to their advantage—creating a buffer between the school and outside intervention. Even when, in the spring of 2011, King learned that students’ math scores were not as high as they would like, King went on the offensive and used this as an opportunity to re-work their math program.

Another way that King actively fostered ‘being peered into’ was through their website. Without this ‘digital footprint’ King’s ability to share what they do would be diminished. By allowing and encouraging anyone in the world with an internet connection to view how King performs school, a certain kind of ‘open source’ feeling

was generated.<sup>15</sup> In viewing many schools' websites it is difficult to get a real sense of the school—most of what is posted are brief statements about the mission, short descriptions of academic programs, the sports schedule and the cafeteria menu. At King, although the site was thick with content and sometimes hard to navigate, the inner workings of the school were laid bare for anyone to see—if they so desired: from examples of student work to the rubric teachers used to plan and debrief their expeditions.

Students creating documentaries about their expeditions also fostered 'being peered into.' It was not just that videos about expeditions were made available for viewing on King's website, but that *students* created these videos: students do the work (alongside adults), which reinforced the overall raison d'être of King—students engaged in rigorous academic work which simultaneously produced things of value.

Welcoming in-person audiences was another way that King fostered 'being peered into.' Each learning expedition ended with a Culminating Event, at which members of the community, including families, professionals who worked with students, district personnel, and/or city council members were invited to a performance of students' work. Most Culminating Events were located at King, but many also were in the community in the form of presentations to the city council or art openings. It was not just that these Culminating Events were designed for an audience, but also that they were held intentionally in, and were part of, the public realm.

As previously mentioned, in addition to Culminating Events, every May the school hosted a Celebration of Learning at the Expo Center - which was next door to

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<sup>15</sup> A quick peek at the websites of the other two middle schools in Portland, Maine shows the dramatic difference between King's and many other schools' websites:  
<http://www2.portlandschools.org/schools/middle-schools/lincoln-middle-school> and  
<http://www2.portlandschools.org/schools/middle-schools/lyman-moore-middle-school>

King—in which students showcased their expedition-related work from the school year. The Celebration of Learning was timed to occur during the Site Seminar that King hosted on behalf of Expeditionary Learning, thus ensuring another 100-plus people as audience members. Putting students and their work ‘out there’ in front of so many people, invited a certain kind of ‘peering into’ and examination that King welcomed.

Particular components of expeditions, as they developed at King, also promoted ‘being peered into,’ including working with local experts, leaving the building to do fieldwork, having a ‘genuine’ audience, and using assessment practices that encouraged scrutiny from multiple sources. Because these features were integral to King’s vision of an excellent learning expedition (as per the Six Step Planning Rubric<sup>16</sup> and other common practices), ‘being peered into’ was inseparable from the actual process of curriculum and instruction at King.

### Visitors to King

In addition to welcoming the above self-crafted audiences, King got hundreds of requests each year from people who wanted to learn more about the school. In the 2010-2011 school year, King hosted approximately 300 people, which was about 100 more than the previous year. Many people, from near and far, came for a ‘professional development day,’ to glimpse what went on at King. During 2010-2011, visits included the entire faculty of a school over the course of several days, nearly all staff from a local district in Maine, teachers from Wyoming and many other teachers and administrators. Students were accustomed to having visitors in their classrooms; teachers were remarkably open to sharing their work. As discussed in the upcoming ‘becoming a

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<sup>16</sup> This document is described in more detail in the Using the Developmental Approach section and is reproduced in Appendix G.

professional' theme, having outside people recognize their work impacted how teachers' performed their roles.

Because of the volume of requests, which steadily increased over the last 10 years, in 2006 King began charging visitors (called a 'donation' on King's website). In spring 2011, the fee was \$150 per person, and entailed a tailored professional development day—lunch included. The considerable amount of money King brought in from visitors was put into the school's Student Activities Fund. That King profited from 'being peered into' is another atypical phenomena at this school.

Visitors shaped the work that teachers did, though sometimes in subtle ways. For example, a house changed the progression of their learning expedition to accommodate a film crew from South Korea who were creating a documentary for Korean public television about 'schools of the future.' They took advantage of the presence of cameras to do something more worthy of being filmed—an activity that probably would have happened later in the expedition, but was done earlier. Is this a case of teachers putting their best foot forward *because* they were being peered into? Is it about taking advantage of the cameras to help excite students? How did the students' experience of fieldwork change because of the filming? See also the upcoming 'Ready Fire Aim' section for more on the positives and negatives of taking opportunities when they come and figuring out later how they fit in.

### Impacting Students and Teachers

The following quote from a teacher demonstrates how students, from their earliest moments, were shaped by 'being peered into:'

In the beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> grade I say to the kids, "this is a special place that you're at." From the very beginning kids are hearing—and they already know in a lot of

cases because their parents are on a waiting list... there are articles in the paper about King. Letting them know that there are visitors that come and sometimes they have video cameras and they come right into the classroom...we are always ready for that kind of thing to happen...you are always aware of what you are doing and making sure that it's as good as it can be. And, kids really respond. We are always saying, "Don't act any differently. Just do your thing. Even if there's a camera in your face just keep doing your thing." They love that. They're like, "Wow this is great. This is so cool."

Students were aware that they were 'being peered into' and this was widely considered positive among staff; it was seen as helping to motivate students to care about doing high-quality academic work. Accordingly, most students were very comfortable talking to visitors and appeared unphased by questions from strangers about their work and experiences at King. As visitors entered classrooms, David or the teacher announced who they were, where they were from and why they were visiting. As a student said, however, they did not always understand what the big deal was about their school: students could get tired of all the questions, because for them, it was just how school was.

Students were also the ones peering, playing a key role in the cultural practice of assessment; they collectively examined each other's work through structured, as well as informal, critique and revision sessions. For example, in media crew David gathered students to scrutinize the work a pair had just completed. In academic classes students exchanged drafts of their writing and gave feedback to each other on strengths and areas for improvement. Students 'peering into' each other's work created a sense of openness and sharing, in which students collaborated and saw each other as resources. This is critical in heterogeneous classrooms – fostering, rather than closing down, students' opportunity to learn from each other, across differences.

Later, in the 'becoming a professional' theme, I describe more specifically how 'making teacher work public' fostered a sense of professionalism at King. Here, however,

I specifically examine how ‘being peered into’ shaped teachers. As mentioned above, teachers ‘being peered into’ was the norm in the following ways: teachers at King were ‘at the ready’ to speak to and host visitors in their classrooms and at their team meetings; teachers shared their work with each other; and their work, via what students produced, was showcased locally, on the website, and nationally via the Expeditionary Learning network.

There were some challenges associated with teachers ‘being peered into.’ As one long-time teacher said, it was often hard to convey to visitors the slow, 20-year process it took to get to where they were now as a school. Put differently, a teacher said that visitors saw the sausage that comes out of the grinder, not the messy process that went in—*this* was harder to share. He said,

We...host a lot of people from a lot of different places and I think sometimes the feeling from the whole staff is like, ‘we’re doing what we do well, but it’s not’...I mean, wow, that’s pretty cool that they think it’s so great because maybe day-to-day it’s not that great. But what comes out the sausage grinder...Oh, that’s a nice tasting sausage! People taste it and go, ‘Oh, mmm, that’s really good, how did you make that?!’ And they want to see the division of labor and the process we go through before it comes out.

Another challenge was, as one teacher said, though exciting, it can be “frightening” to be on display: when student work was literally up on stage, it laid bare evidence of teacher labor. For instance, at a culminating event, scores of people—including parents, friends, the superintendent, school staff—came to see students’ performances; these performances were the summation of their own efforts over the last several months. They were invested in the students doing well because it, in part, reflected their own capabilities as a teacher.

Ultimately, ‘being peered into’ fostered a sense of pride among teachers. From the principal’s perspective, teachers felt a collective ownership over the school and their work. This pride was fueled by media attention, visits by other teachers and attention from researchers.

An atypical example helps make sense of the impact of ‘being peered into’ on teacher and the school. Although this example was more akin to a feeling of being attacked, King was able to turn a potentially harmful-to-their-reputation circumstance into a positive one. In 2007, McCarthy and the school were lambasted for his decision to make birth control available to a student. The principal used the analogy of “circling the wagons and shooting outward” to deal with the onslaught of scrutiny. However, despite intense examination from local and national media, the strength of the King community shone` more brightly and the situation, in the end, brought staff closer rather than break them apart.

### Wanting a Piece of King

King has recently received so much attention that ‘being peered into’ and the resulting recognition was sometimes a burden. David got so many requests for visits that it was often challenging to do the rest of his job. At a leadership meeting in December 2010, David said that he needed a better way to manage visitor interest. He said, “No more water-torture trickling” in reference to the constant, near daily, requests he received. He proposed consolidating visitors, in essence funneling them to a few pre-established dates to try to slow down the constant influx of inquires and the corresponding “slow trickle” of work he then had to do—including making revisions to the PowerPoint presentation, arranging for classroom visits with teachers, or making handouts/packets. In



Spring 2011, David set aside two days, in addition to the Site Seminar days, which were advertised on the website as follows:

King receives dozens of requests for group visits annually from schools, businesses, and organizations interested in ELS, school reform, and effective technology integration. We have scheduled two days this spring for group visits, March 15th and April 17th. We have a requested donation of \$150 per person per day for group visits.

David also considered saying no to requests – it was clear that this did not usually happen.

At one point David said, “Everyone wants a piece of King” when he talked about all of the different requests he was currently juggling: multiple teacher visit requests, one from Apple Computers, and ongoing negotiations with Expeditionary Learning. Apple, for instance, wanted to nominate King for their “Distinguished School Award.” King had the luxury, given the volume of alternate forms of recognition, to turn the offer down; it was not in King’s interest to be nominated for this award, since the primary tangible outcome for King was getting an Apple “Distinguished Schools” logo for their website. King (as per David) decided that they would not really benefit and only would potentially be burdened by having to host *more* visitors, so the school declined.

Over the years, as the volume and type of interest in King has increased, King has crafted ways to work this to their advantage. Despite sometimes being overwhelmed by the amount, King stays a few steps ahead.

#### Summary: Self-sustaining Loop

Ultimately, ‘being peered into’ created a self-sustaining loop at King. As one teacher said, “You want to put your best work out there because people are coming to take a look at it.” This speaks to the synergy among high quality work, recognition and ‘being peered into.’ I am not just interested that this happens, but that teachers and others

believed that this was, and used it as, a leverage point – that having an audience, ‘putting your work out there,’ impels both students and teachers to put their best foot forward. This discourse was prevalent throughout King.

Getting positive recognition reinforced a sense of pride in one’s self and school, attracted money, and buffered the school from district-directed reforms. It also generated positive relationships with people and organizations in the community. David said that everyone likes “opportunities to be good” and by King intentionally telling its story, the legend of King continued to grow.

Here the cultural practice of assessment was evident in many ways. The evaluative process inherent in ‘being peered into’ both shaped and was shaped by the cultural practice of assessment. At King, intentionally fostering outside scrutiny encouraged the community to engage with, and evaluate, the inner workings of King, and in a way King produced its own audience. This is radically different than how the current accountability climate engenders feelings of being attacked and vilified by media and community members, which tends to foster a shutting of doors rather than an opening of them.

### Interlude #3: Michael's Ongoing Relationship with Gerald Talbot

During the Small Acts expedition, and into the future, Michael developed a personal connection to Mr. Talbot. By February, 2011, Michael considered his interviewee a friend. He said, "Well, me and Gerry, like, our relationship it's more than the expedition, more than the interviews and stuff. I've seen him outside of school and I think we're pretty good friends." In this interlude I present key episodes in their developing relationship and Michael's description of what these moments meant to him. Part of how Michael described his relationship was through being noticed and recognized in a specific way by Mr. Talbot—one that Michael could not quite articulate – but that mirrored a certain kind of 'being peered into' as an individual.

#### Culminating Event

Part of the development of Michael's relationship with Mr. Talbot occurred at the Culminating Event for Small Acts of Courage. At this event, in which all 80 7<sup>th</sup> graders took the stage to share mini-versions of their written narratives, Michael had multiple roles, including a regular speaking role, a special introductory role, and a singing solo during the musical performance. Michael, on several occasions, vividly recalled his sense of being watched by Mr. Talbot—and that Mr. Talbot (and others) were taking special notice of him. Michael said:

[A teacher] told me, "Do you see him? He's focused on you." I was like, "Where?" And he pointed and I was like, "Oh!"...I think they really appreciated what we did. We took time out of our day to write and interview and learn about their stories—stories that most people don't know about and I think they were proud of everyone. After that, when we went to the library to have the snacks, he came up to me—not Gerald Talbot but the other one – he came up to me and shook my hand and said, "Great job. Keep doing what you're doing." And that was a very, like, inspiring moment for me.

Later in this same interview, Michael also said:

I had two speeches...and they were really focused and looking at me and then ... when it was someone else's turn to give the speech—I'm not sure, I think it was Gerald who was still looking at me—and he gave—his wife gave me a thumb's up. And I just started smiling.

These seemingly simple and fleeting moments of exchange between Michael, Mr. Talbot and people associated with Mr. Talbot are examples of the power of being noticed, being acknowledged on a deeply personal level. They are also additional examples of the impossibility of separating Michael's academic and social engagement; said another way, the inability to separate Michael's content knowledge from his building of relationships.

#### Running into Mr. Talbot

As previously mentioned, the curricular feature of interviewing *local* people was an important factor in Michael's engagement. Being local meant that Michael had occasional, planned and unplanned, access to his interviewee. On one occasion, several months after the interview, Michael bumped into Mr. Talbot and his wife on the streets of Portland. In describing this chance encounter, Michael said:

In the summer I was riding my bike...and I saw Gerald and his wife and I stopped and I gave him a high five. And before the interview started he told me he has, like, a memory problem and he has a hearing problem but as soon as I saw him he remembered my name. And...he took a while on my last name but he got it. And so I gave him a handshake and I said, "Hi" and they're like, "How are things at King?" And I was like, "We haven't started school yet." And they are like, "OK." And I was like, "Thanks." And then I just left.

It was clearly important to Michael that Mr. Talbot not only remembered him, but remembered his first and last name, despite his 'hearing and memory problem.' Again, a simple exchange, but one in a series of relationship-building moments.

## Portrait Unveiling

As shown throughout my research, the Small Acts of Courage expedition continued on, almost as if it had a life of its own, well after the official end of the expedition. This included students being invited in January of 2011 to the unveiling of a new portrait of Mr. Talbot, painted by Maine artist, Robert Shetterly, who, over the last nine years, produced a series called, “Americans Who Tell the Truth.”<sup>17</sup> Caitlin, who was contacted about getting students involved two nights before the unveiling, called each of the students from Mr. Talbot’s interview team at home, even though these students had since moved on to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She enlisted their help and asked them to deliver short speeches. When the students and Caitlin walked into the event, they did not know how their roles would play out; there were about 60 people in the audience, including local press.

Caitlin told Michael, who was one of three students who went, that she picked him not only because he was one of Mr. Talbot’s interviewers, but also because of his excellent and hard work during the expedition. The timing for Michael was somewhat ironic since it came at the heels of recently being suspended for fighting in the park across from the school. Afterwards, Michael told Caitlin that going to the unveiling was an incredible experience—one that he would never forget. This contrast between stepping up, being involved and caring about Small Acts of Courage with the behavioral missteps

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<sup>17</sup> Several King teachers have worked with Shetterly – Caitlin and Karen’s team did in the fall of 2010 in their 6<sup>th</sup> grade expedition. At the same time, York 8 worked with Shetterly during their Four Freedoms expedition. Unbeknownst to Shetterly, when there was talk about having students involved in the unveiling of Talbot’s portrait, the students being asked were not just from King Middle School, but also were from a Caitlin/Karen expedition. This was a surprised connection – one that demonstrates the overlapping worlds in which King and this artist reside.

is stark. Caitlin said that some people at King probably did not agree with her decision to take Michael to the event, though the principal supported her decision.

When I spoke with him a few weeks after the unveiling, I told Michael I heard from Caitlin that he had said the event was “incredible” and that he said he would never forget it. I asked whether that was accurate and he said:

Yeah. I wouldn’t forget it because his daughter [Rachel Talbot Ross] started crying after we all said what we had to say about Gerry....We all did a little speech thing and she was trying to talk ‘cause it was her turn to go up to the mic. She was trying to talk but she really couldn’t because she was crying and I won’t forget it ‘cause all the like smiles I saw and all the people who looked really happy [in the audience]... ‘cause we care. And actually, there’s this basketball league called AAU that I tried out for and Gerry’s grandson, his name’s Walter, he’s actually the head coach and I saw him at the [unveiling] and I also saw him, I also saw him at the try outs. And he just said “thank you” to me and he said what we’re doing at this school is really important and really special.

It is worth teasing out the layers within Michael’s words. First, the notion of Michael realizing that people were deeply moved by students’ caring about not just civil rights, but about specific people’s contribution, was evident. He was touched by “all the smiles” and “all the people who looked really happy” in the audience. He also found it incredible that Mr. Talbot’s daughter was so choked up that she couldn’t speak.<sup>18</sup> Second, there was the sense that people in the community – not just those present in the audience—cared about the students’ work. Another family member of Mr. Talbot’s addressed Michael’s and other students’ work, widening the importance of their work beyond Mr. Talbot: other people in the community took notice and were impressed.

In addition to being recognized for their work, Michael again conveyed the special attention he himself garnered from Mr. Talbot. Michael said,

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<sup>18</sup> Rachel Talbot Ross, the current president of the Portland branch of the NAACP, was also one of the interviewees.

Actually, when we left, everyone gave him a hug and we're about to leave and he told ... Jessica and Faith to take care of themselves. He was like, "You two take care of yourself and you, YOU better take care of yourself" to me, and, well, it just seems like, I don't know, it just seems like he notices me more than the others or something like that, I don't really know what it is.

The sense of 'being noticed more than others' was powerful for Michael. To be recognized for his hard work—and for something about who Michael was that he could not quite put his finger on—furthered Michael's own engagement in Small Acts despite the expedition being 'over' for nine months.

### Summary

In this interlude there is a synergy between academic content and social relationships, where the two entwine to create a one-of-a-kind opportunity for Michael to be moved by the impact of his contributions. His work mattered. He received direct feedback, in several different ways, across many months, from multiple people. His *efforts* were acknowledged—both the care that he demonstrated through his work (the physical books that were produced) and through his personal presence at public events. This was significant to him, his teachers, and his interviewee. He was personally thanked, in public, by multiple people—people he truly respected. The kind of recognition that Michael received could not have been prescribed or predicted before hand.

Why does this kind of recognition matter? What does it do for a student like Michael? In one way it matters because students learn lessons about being known—as productive members of the community, as children from a well-respected school, and as students who are capable of high-quality academic work. Recognition also brings pride in accomplishments—that is buoyed by input from multiple sources. Miettinen's phrase

(2005) “contribute to the vitality of the community” (p. 63) is an apt way to describe Michael’s involvement—he sees his contribution and feels the impact of his work.

Although many schools adopt special programs, in addition to their regular curriculum, to reach social development goals, the whole-school approach at King, embedded into expeditions, appears to simultaneously develop social goals, engage the community, and produce work that matters. By combining academics and social outcomes, King—and other schools like it—creates opportunities for learning and development that reach toward students learning and developing alongside, and within, their local community.



## Performing Student Work

*You've got to get it out there otherwise they are making work for no one.*

At King, making work public was the norm. Students and teachers were well practiced at getting on stages and performing their findings in front of live audiences. Instead of the typical cycle of doing work in exchange for a grade, getting their work 'out there' meant that students were producing work for someone. The opening quote, as well as the title of Chapter 7, is a phrase David used to explain why it was critical to make student work public.

In this theme I explore the 'performance of student work' at King. The word *performance* and *performing* takes on multiple meanings: not simply describing the act of being on stage and showcasing work in front of an audience, but also the process through which students carry out the role of being a student. In both senses, I share the ways that students performed throughout their expeditions, how students got ready to make their work public, what supported the actual act of putting work in front of an audience, and the affordances and constraints of different formats for making work public (e.g., posting online, publishing a book or doing a presentation to the mayor). As I show, specific assessment practices were explicitly and implicitly embedded in these processes and thus contributed to, and defined, the cultural practice of assessment throughout King.

## Publishing Student Work

A key aspect of performing school at King was students aiming toward public presentations of work. What these presentations looked like depended on the expedition's content and guiding questions, the historical residue of past expeditions (i.e., what was been done before, what went well, etc.), shifting teacher interests and talents,

and access to resources such as technology and outside experts. Students publicly performing their work involved two related components: a physical/tangible product and a recounting of their work with a live audience. All students were responsible for performing their work in both ways; the two aspects were often inseparable. Despite their interconnectedness, the different facets of *publishing* and *performances of* student work are important to recognize. Moving from only publishing to also performing is what Magnifico (2010) says “transforms the writer into something much closer to an orator” in which the “audience can talk back” (p. 174) and thus provide feedback. At King, students were orators and only rarely produced physical representations of their work. However, *publishing* created durable artifacts that existed across time.

At King, performing student work through publishing ranged from professionally bound books, to documentary videos posted on the school’s website, to live websites, to laminated posters hung in public spaces. Differences among these examples included the format of the artifact, who the audience was and how the published work was accessed. Each of these formats created different affordances for recognition and evaluation. See Appendix F for a list of formats of student work, compiled by Expeditionary Learning, which takes into account King’s, and other Expeditionary Learning schools’ student work.

Publishing formats at King evolved over time, with one begetting another - both within and outside of King—striving for things that as David said, “Actually look like something made in the real world.” For example, the publishing of *Into the Zone: Where the Land Meets the Water* in 1995, as previously mentioned, was a turning point. Not only was the writing and artwork exceptional, the field guide *format* followed professional standards (making student work as close to professional work as possible),

and was reproduced in book format (and subsequently sold) making it accessible to audiences. The success of this field guide—both at King and other schools – spawned many others like it. At King these included: *A Tree Grows in Portland*, *A Park Grows in Portland*, *Into the Woods*, *Maine’s Flora*. At one school in particular, the field guide format was taken to higher level. High Tech High in San Diego, California, produced a series of six field guides about the San Diego area—the quality of which was indistinguishable from professional work.

Given emerging technology in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the field guide format at King was transposed from a printed publication to a nearly all-digital format—and from science content to social/historical topics. This included the publication of a CD-ROM of the Fading Footprints expedition—which focused on endangered species—and the creation of an entirely web-based format for Sparks of Liberty, an expedition on the Revolutionary War. These emerging formats allowed students to publish their work in ever-evolving ways—always keeping fresh the type of publication students were working on and keeping teachers innovating. Another technological trend was toward what David called “editable media:” instead of literally gluing work to the page, as in traditional collage, students created products that could be digitally manipulated.

Different publishing formats created affordances and constraints to how students participated in school and how audiences accessed, and assessed, their work. As previously mentioned, David called King’s website the ultimate canvas for publishing student work because of the web’s nearly unlimited capacity to put student work in front of an audience, the low cost, and ease of this type of publishing. The web, however, was different from producing ‘hold in your hands’ artifacts: student work was less tangible

when showcased digitally because the audiences were largely unknown, personal contact with students was limited, and issues around access to technology - such as generational differences—could create barriers.

### Performing Student Work

In this section I look at how students at King performed, in the traditional sense, their work in different venues for multiple purposes. Staged performances occurred at Culminating Events at the school, in the mayor's office, and at Portland's First Friday Gallery Walk. Students, individually and collectively, presented their work with people from outside their classroom. Performances ranged from PowerPoint presentations of research findings, 'performing arts' performances such as music or dance, talking about work one-on-one in a reception-style format, and well-orchestrated 80-person showcases.

Although any kind of 'making work public' can be compelling, there was something special about how live performances engaged students in their best work and thus was a lever in 'getting all students to the top of the mountain.' As the music teacher said:

We could be slugging through rehearsals and sometimes they're good and sometimes they're not and the whole process can be quite messy. But, when you get them on stage in front of people, the whole perspective changes...suddenly it's just more meaningful. It's not just us in a room...it's our parents, our grandparents, and friends and community and it just makes it more important to them...it raises the stakes. There's someone else watching now.

"Someone else watching" transformed the work that students did at King. The stakes were higher; there was more to lose and more to gain. Students knew they needed to be prepared and thus dug in and worked hard.

An important component of students performing was the engagement of audience members: the performance was impactful for them, too, which in turn was part of why the experience was meaningful to students. As one teacher said:

The adults love it, too. Everybody's loving it. Which is what it's all about! Those are the magical moments. When we are all having fun. Where you just get chills down your spine. This is it. This is what it's supposed to be like.

Audience members 'getting chills down their spines' is an apt way to describe the emotional response many adults feel when watching students perform. As Holzman (2009) said in describing her own experience watching students perform,

Their energy, concentration, boldness and letting the audience see how much they care about what they are doing moves me deeply. Showing that you care is not easy for anyone in the current culture, and it is especially hard for adolescents. Environments in which they can take this risk are, in my opinion, very special...providing opportunities for performances that are the unity of intellect and affect, performances of caring, interest, curiosity and passion (p. 67).

In this quote, Holzman articulates the power of students performing—it gives them the opportunity to care deeply about something, become vulnerable by showing their best work to an audience, and that performances bring together many elements of students' lives: academic learning, social connections, and emotional fortitude.

In addition to 'performing' in the usual sense of the word, 'performing student work' at King had another meaning. David spoke about "performing *the process*" which meant the steps that led to the final product. A final product usually did not reflect all aspects of an expedition: the essence of what students did and experienced was as important as what they produced at the end. He used the example of water quality testing—students performed various acts and learned many skills when testing the quality of water. Data and results were shown in the final report; however, the acts and process were not readily evident. He said that students' actual work with water sampling was

more important than what was shown in the final product. This emphasis on students undertaking performances throughout an expedition, not just at the end, was critical to understanding the entire process—and of students’ participation in expeditions.

Along these lines, classroom assessment practices often focused on mini-performances of student work, where students presented work to each other, and to the teacher, for feedback. For example, many teachers used a formative assessment practice called the Gallery Walk, in which students hung their work on the wall and other students used sticky notes to write feedback on strengths and specific suggestions for improvement.

The concept of timescales helps make sense of the above examples: participation happens on multiple scales of time—it is not simply the sum total of *all* engaged moments, but instead is shaped through the accumulation of opportunities for engagement (i.e., performances) over moments, lessons, expeditions, and school years. Students at King ‘performed school that mattered’ in ways big and small—in brief moments that go relatively unnoticed and the grander events in which literally everyone is up on a stage.

#### ‘Doing Theater’ with Students

Performing student work at King had yet another meaning. Students working with, and alongside, professionals was, as David said, often like “doing theater.” students were practicing being professionals but were not *actually* professionals. Sometimes students got close, but it would be a stretch to get true professional-quality work from middle school students. This was not negative—David said that “students are playing a role,” that they “learn by pretending,” and that “theater is fine as long as they [students] don’t find out.” This alternative meaning of “performing” fits with Holzman’s (2009) interpretation

of Vygotsky – that development occurs through ‘standing a head taller’ and through opportunities to be both you are, and you are not, at the same time. Students are ‘trying on’ being a professional—they have the opportunity to both ‘be and become’ at the same time.

As one teacher said in reference to the music festival,

We have student acts and professional acts that play alongside of each other...and often times leading up to the performances we have the professionals come in and share their craft and work with kids...they’re working with professionals, they are performing with professionals, they feel like they’re professionals...That’s when they really take ownership. They feel like it’s important.

He went on to say,

We strive toward professional quality work and, let’s be honest, the kids are not professionals...they’re shown a professional quality product and we strive towards that but I think it’s always about just trying to get the most from the kids as you can.

Performing the role of a professional, in these teachers’ eyes, was as important as being a professional: it acknowledges the developmental process of students ‘being and becoming.’ These ‘theatrical’ performances create the opportunity to learn.

Another way to think about ‘doing theater’ with students, is when students performed their work for an audience that was constructed for students. As one teacher said, sometimes audiences were gathered so students could gain the effect of sharing their work with somebody. For example, having elementary students come to King to be the audience for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade’s play was different than having interviewees and their families—people who had a personal stake in what students presented—witness student work. This is also “performing the process” or “doing theater” with students, in a double sense of the phrase: putting on a performance of doing a performance.

### Preparing for Performance and Publication

Because of the public nature of work at King and the care for the quality of their product, people across the school labored over the process of getting ready to present work to an audience. Drafting, editing, rehearsing, and getting feedback were integral to the cultural practices of this school. The amount of energy dedicated to getting ready was astounding. Although not a seamless process every go-around, the attention to ‘craftsmanship’ was more than a school-wide practice enlisted to get the best work out of students—it was part of the fabric of King. As Berger says, this school-wide ‘ethic of excellence’ is critical to engaging students in doing their best work (Berger, 2003). Students and teachers knew that first drafts and first rehearsals did not represent students’ best work—it was only through multiple drafts, constant practicing - as well as public critique - that their work was slowly transformed, each time closer to excellence.

Both students and teachers were enmeshed in ‘putting your best foot forward’ and each had stakes (though different ones) in performing well and looking good. It was *through* and *because of* this kind of work that King – the school, teachers, and students—was recognized; therefore students and teachers diligently rehearsed for performances. Accordingly, it was hard to untangle performances from audience; from being recognized from being peered into.

Part of getting ready for publishing and performing was the previously mentioned ‘use of professional conventions.’ By following professional standards, students both learned the skills embedded in the standards and attracted audiences; in turn, the audience viewed their work differently. In other words, because their work met certain professional standards, people took notice and said, “Wow! That looks like professional work.” For



example, as mentioned in the ‘telling the story’ theme, when producing media, David worked closely with students to use professional standards as a way to communicate with outside audiences.

Performance dramatically changed how students engaged in school, especially when combined with professionals, professional equipment and professional standards.

One teacher said,

When you get them on a stage like that...with a professional sound system, professional music acts who are performing alongside them, then...they are ecstatic. They just can’t believe it. Then they perform and it’s a real moment for the kids. That’s been shining the last couple of years.

Creating a *professional* product was part of what fostered participation.

Teachers’ roles were also transformed; they developed new skills to help students get ready for culminating performances and final publications. Because the role of teachers became that of publishers and producers, it was important for them to learn from each other’s work. Some teachers knew “how to train kids” for these events and really worked practicing into the expedition schedule; others were newer to the process. In an effort to help teachers learn from each other, the leadership at King sometimes granted teachers release time to observe other teams’ processes. These high-quality events thus served as exemplars for future performances.

### Using Exemplars

As described above example, an important component of the cultural practice of assessment at King was creating and using *exemplars*. Exemplars were forms of the final product or culminating performance that were shown to students as examples of what they would be working toward. People at King believed that exemplars made the end

result more tangible to students while also giving them a specific example of what they would create or perform.

As part of their expedition planning, teachers themselves created an exemplar of what students would produce. Teachers worked together and typically presented exemplars to their teams for review. Seeing a potential exemplar sometimes prompted teams to re-think the direction of expeditions. For example, if the end product would take too much time for students to create, not hit the right learning targets, not provide opportunities for individual and collective student work, or not have definable targets along the way, the team would re-work the exemplar to be better aligned with established goals.

The books that Caitlin and Karen created during their week-long Learning Expedition for Educators in Little Rock, Arkansas, is an example of how exemplars were created by teachers and then used by students. Teachers participated in an expedition that was similar to what students would do in Small Acts of Courage—they published books that contained narratives based on their interviews with local members of the Little Rock community who played a role in the Civil Rights Movement. Karen and Caitlin asked their own students to critique the teacher-made books, students used ‘first lines’ from each of the narratives as examples for their own writing, and the template teachers used informed what students followed in their own books.

Student work also served as exemplars. When expeditions were repeated, students’ published work and performances were shown to the next group of students. Students used past work as a starting point—often beginning by highlighting what they liked and what they would change about previous work. This cyclical process, which was infused

with assessment, meant that *future* student work engaged the accomplishments of previous years' students. This is very different from many schools where students are told to 'do their own work,' sharing resources is looked at as cheating, and work from one year does not carry forward to the next.

King's use of exemplars is another example of student work as boundary objects. Student and teacher-created artifacts were purposefully used as sites of negotiation. Strengths and weaknesses were assessed in service of developing *future* work. Exemplars were artifacts that became tools, fostering the creation of *new* resources.

#### 'The Golden Nugget' - Performing in, for, and alongside Community

In many ways, collaboration and community were at the heart of all learning expeditions: students worked alongside other people, created things of value, and learned to be recognizable members of the community. Similarly, collaboration and community were part of teacher professionalism, demonstrating symmetry between what teachers practiced and what students were asked to do. King was adept at bridging what is often a divide between school and community. These connections were bolstered, and constituted, by the cultural practice of assessment.

The following quote from Caitlin evokes the potential outcome of performing—both in the sense of performing the process and performing the end—in and with the community, asking the question, in the end:

Did the kids have a good connection with their person?...It was more about that...than hearing an awesome account. Even the kids that went to the nursing home and the guy that said, "I've never seen a black person in [my] life," ended up getting a great story. Even when they came back, it's ok, because he's still visiting the guy in the nursing home and he, the guy at the nursing home who wrote a letter to the editor because he was so impressed with the kids. Just all of that. That was more important than having a great [story]...That community connection piece has ended up being the golden nugget. So hugely important the

stories we captured, so valuable. But, the connection that we have with people and their reflection – how it reflects back on King also—and the connection that these kids had was...awesome.

Caitlin here expresses the value of students and community members connecting *through* student work. The students, the nursing home resident and King's reputation all benefited. Although students were learning about the Civil Rights Movement, the golden nugget was "the community connection piece."

Another outcome was creating new, while maintaining, long-standing partnerships with individuals and community-based organizations. Part of the benefit here was bringing academic work into the 'real world.' One example from the early days of implementing reform at King was developing a relationship with the Gulf of Maine Aquarium. Seeing the growth of students who sat on the board prompted several teachers to capitalize on connecting students to community members and organizations. David did say, however, that working with community organizations was another form of 'doing theater' with students: what organizations got out of school-community partnership was often intangible. For example, students did not always produce professional-quality results such as valid data, but organizations did get "spiritual" benefits such as feeling good about their connections to students and being able to showcase their involvement with schools. Another teacher added that not every project was equally impactful to the local community. She said that sometimes "we're not moving Portland as a city forward" and that was all right.

There were several dilemmas related to working with the community. First, as David reiterated, what was most important were the student learning outcomes. David questioned the need to consider what the community got out of their collaborative efforts,

since the community was a vehicle for reaching student outcomes—not that the by-product was unimportant, just that student learning trumped any concern for other benefits.

Another challenge, as one teacher said, was balancing the amount of energy they put into managing the relationship with the community organization. She said, “You gotta say that mantra over and over again, ‘OK. Who are we in charge of here?’”

A result of performing with and in the community was the feedback that students received. One teacher said:

We knew that part of the Culminating Event was going to be a public showing. [The products] were just phenomenal. Then when the kids started getting feedback from other teachers and other kids...Then they were asked to put it in a gallery in Maine College of Art and we started getting written feedback from the general public that was just phenomenal. Absolutely phenomenal. And, it was one of those things the school didn’t get a lot of press from, but the feedback that the kids received...

The principal also spoke to the benefit of students working in and for the community. In regard to Small Acts of Courage he said:

I still hear from other people in the community about that study and so it’s a win-win, you can’t lose...and every time you do something in the community and talk about the school, the legend grows.

McCarthy’s quote highlights the inner workings of the relationship between not just ‘making work public,’ but actually collaborating with people in the community. Both the school and community members benefit. He also said that as the legend grows, it is easier and easier to get others involved from the community.

### Performing Together

As the music teacher said, “The element of teamwork in Expeditionary Learning plays right in to what happens in the ensembles—achieving the best sound as a group and working together.” The idea of ‘achieving the best sound together’ can serve as a

metaphor for the way students at King perform school. Though individual progress was valued and assessed, much of student work was done collaboratively. This purposeful strategy helped heterogeneous groups of students work not just alongside, but with, each other.

Effort was placed on developing collaboration skills, fostered in several ways, from the first moment students walked into the building.

- As 6<sup>th</sup> graders, students' first expedition focused on their role as a member of the King community.
- Student work groups continually changed – by the end of an expedition, all students worked with every other student. Often these groups were the result of teachers' efforts to balance student strengths, personalities, etc.
- All students took part in Crew, an advisory-like group where students met together once every six days to check-in with each other and develop team-building and communication skills.
- As 7<sup>th</sup> graders, students went on a three-day retreat to a local outdoor education center to get to know each other better and work on leadership skills.
- In most classrooms students created a 'full value contract' in which they contributed to establishing and agreeing upon behavioral guidelines.

Students' culminating products and performances struck a balance between individual demonstrations of academic achievement and the collective effort of the entire grade level/house. These 'ensemble performances' are again akin to Holzman's interpretation of Vygotsky and the notion of the *zone of proximal development*. She asserts that it is through "a collective form of working together" (Holzman, 2010, p. 30) that people grow and develop. She goes on to describe this as "a *methodology of becoming* in which people shape and reshape their relationships to themselves, each other, and to the material and psychological tools and objects of their world"

(p. 31, emphasis in the original). Because King emphasized collaboration within academic and community performances, students gained the opportunity to grow and develop *through* the ensemble.

### Summary

As shown in this theme, both performing the process, and the culmination of work, was infused with assessment. Students at King continually made their work public; it was normal to solicit feedback from peers, teachers, outside professionals, and known and unknown audience members. Publishing and performing student work was at the heart of the cultural practice of assessment at King and was infused with collaborative community involvement.

Additionally, as students worked on their products and prepared for performances they were aware that they would be sharing their work—both individually and collectively - with audiences. For example, as students worked on their interviewee’s narratives, they had in mind both the interviewees themselves, as well as the less tangible idea that the books would be presented to the special collections library. Being aware of audience simultaneously shaped the type of work that students did (what will my audience want to see?) and deeply engaged students (how will I produce something of quality?): both *how* students participated and *what* they produced.

In the end, ‘performing school’ at King looked very differently than in many schools. They were not only generating work that mattered beyond the walls of the school, they were collectively sharing it with outside people. ‘Standing a head taller,’ as part of an ‘ensemble,’ is critical to a certain kind of performing school: students grow and develop

*through* their performances, rather than the more typical approach of individual students competing for grades.



#### Interlude #4: Sharing the Rap

The following example deepens an understanding of Michael's entwined social/academic participation and is an example of performing student work on a different scale of time. During this 90-second exchange from May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010, after the end of the Small Acts of Courage expedition - when a whole-class conversation was interrupted by the phone ringing—Michael quietly shared a rap with his tablemates. The rap is a snippet of a song called “Black History” by the Miller Boyz<sup>19</sup>. Despite the seemingly ‘off-task’ behavior of rapping in class, Michael’s choice of lyrics fit within the topic of the day’s class: the Underground Railroad and the movement to end slavery.

[Phone rings – Caitlin answers it. As she talks on the phone, the following exchange occurs.]

Michael – Wanna hear a song? [says to table mates]

Faith – OK.

Michael – It’s a rap.

“From Georgia to Alabama, to Mississippi, they put him in the slammer.

The boy had no rights. He tried to live his life.

They burned crosses in the yard just to scare his wife.

Thanks to him we dream” –

[ends rap]

Whoa. When’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day? What month is it in?

Student – April? March?

Michael – March? Whatever?

Faith – When is MLK day?

Michael – January? January?

Faith – When’s MLK day?

Michael – [Back to rap song] “January 15<sup>th</sup> that’s all they got to celebrate Martin Luther King.”

Nah, I’ll just start all over again.

“From Georgia to Alabama, to Mississippi. They put him in the slammer.

The boy had no rights, he tried to live his life.

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<sup>19</sup> For contextualization, this is a link to the song’s music video:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sY0HniFP4FA>

They burned crosses in the yard just to scare his wife.

They say...February 15<sup>th</sup>...something 15...it's all we got to celebrate Martin Luther King. Don't even exercise our rights to vote." –

**Student** – Shhh.

**Michael** – “Blame the government because our people still broke.”

**Faith** – Awesome! Do it again. Do it again.

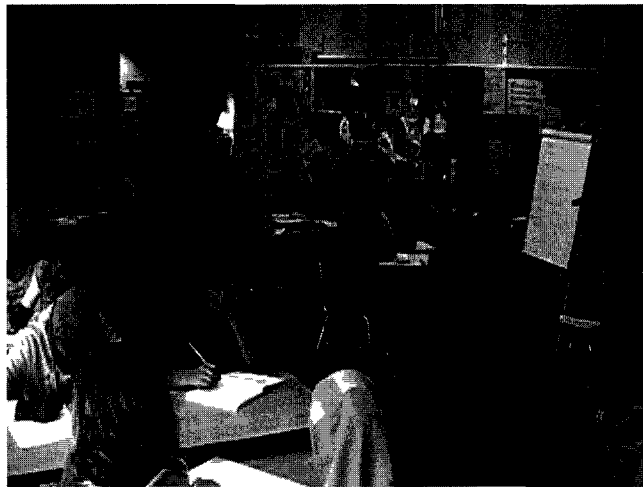
**Caitlin** – [Off the phone – getting back to the content of the whole-class conversation] OK, so a person committed to ending slavery. Sorry about that [referring to the phone call].

**Faith** – Michael. Michael. You should... [whispering at the same time the teacher is talking to the whole class]

**Caitlin** – Some of the things we will be learning about and preparing for our walk of the Freedom Trail have to do with the Underground Railroad and with abolitionists and with slavery....

Figure 6

Still video image from the moment when the phone rang and Michael started sharing the rap with tablemates



The above photo brings imagery to individual moments of performance within classrooms. Amidst the moment-to-moment happenings, many performances of students' academic and social selves occur outside of the teacher's possible scope (how possibly to

attend to or take in everything that happens), and in the in-between-moments that mark transitions, interruptions or down time.

In October 2010 when I met up with Michael, I played him this segment of audio and asked him what was going through his mind that day. Having no problem remembering, he quickly said:

Michael – During Black History Month in 2006 there was this song, it was about civil rights and for some reason...it just ran through my head and I was just like, “Wait a second, I know a rap” and so I just started doing it and it was actually kind of funny but it actually had a message.

Alison – What’s the message?

Michael – The message is just pretty much standing up for your rights and telling the story, they are telling a story and they are kind of like we can’t blame the government because our people aren’t making money...And there was a message and it’s about pretty much standing up and saying what you believe. I was going to ask if I could share it –

Alison – Yeah, I was wondering about that.

Michael – But, I don’t know, Ms. LeClair...I don’t know if she would allow it. There’s nothing bad in it, but I just...

Alison – Why do you think she might not have allowed it?

Michael – Um, I don’t know actually. I have no idea what was running through my mind, but, I just thought about it and I was just like “never mind.”

Michael’s awareness of his performance was poignant. Although he considered asking Caitlin if he could perform the rap for the class, he was unsure of whether she would approve. He also said that at first his tablemates thought he had made up the rap and he played into their false belief. Later that day he did tell Faith that he had not written the rap and that the rap, that he knew from a few years ago, had just popped into his head.

## Summary

In this example, several processes are at play. That Michael was covert in his performance of the rap signifies his belief that rap music did not have a place in this classroom. Also, Michael received recognition—being egged on by tablemates (specifically his good friend, Faith)—for performing this rap; attention for material that related to what was being studied. Thus, Michael preserved his ‘I’m participating in school—I care about this topic—but I live on the edges of being a ‘bad boy.’” Guitierrez, Baquendano-Lopez and Tejeda (1999) say that *hybridity* “occurs when people attempt to make sense of one’s identity in relation to prevailing notions of self and cultural practices” (p. 288). These authors go on to say that “some classroom communities resist the transformation, whereas others opportunistically view these emergent activities as fruitful contexts of development” (p. 288). Caitlin’s classroom fell somewhere in the middle, allowing students’ identities to be present, but guiding them toward established academic outcomes. How did these performative moments, characterized as “triggers of transformation or expansion” (p. 289), both propel Michael’s participation as well as ‘thicken’ his own academic and social identity? I am more interested here that these moments did occur for Michael—as vivid and punctuated instances—that garnered recognition from his classmates.

## CHAPTER 8

### AN INCREDIBLE PROCESS OF EVOLVING

In this chapter I present the final two themes that emerged from my analysis: (1) Becoming a professional; and (2) Using the developmental approach. Both themes focus on the role of teachers and staff at King and the evolution of school-wide practices over time. The chapter's title—'An Incredible Process of Evolving'—is a quote from an Expeditionary Learning staff person that describes the transformation of professionalism among teachers at King *and* the ever-developing implementation of reform efforts. In the end, both themes speak to the trajectory of the school's cultural practice of assessment.

#### Becoming a Professional

At King, teachers and other staff embodied a sense of professionalism that was both shaped and enabled by 'making work public.' Unlike many schools where teachers struggle for professional esteem, over the last 20 years, teachers at King have become professionals. In this section, I share what it meant to be a professional at King, how this evolved over time, and the role that sharing student and teacher work with outside audiences had in this progression. Through my analytical work in this section, the cultural practice of assessment more robustly includes the internal and external evaluation of teachers and the ways that recognition shaped these professionals.

#### Making Teaching Less Lonely

At King, teachers' work was made public in many ways: it was part of the fabric of life at King and was how teachers performed their jobs. Evidence of teacher work—

such as expedition plans or what students produced—was shared with many people, both in and outside of the school. Teachers worked collaboratively on teams, sharing their work through ongoing negotiations about expedition plans and implementation. Teachers also regularly presented their work to each other for critique. For example, at summer meetings teachers shared their upcoming expedition plans to their peers for input by doing a Gallery Walk of each other's work: teachers hung poster-sized plans of the upcoming year around the cafeteria, and then put post-it notes with specific feedback about areas of strength and things to work on, on each other's work. Teachers' work was also routinely on display with people from outside the school, through Culminating Events, by welcoming visitors into their classrooms, and working with outside professionals.

The following everyday example shows one way that teachers' work was made public. In the fall of 2010, one 7<sup>th</sup> grade teaching team kicked off their expedition with Cow Innards Day. In each of four rooms, stations were set up with different freshly butchered cow organs—and a human skeleton to teach students about body systems. Each station was staffed by a different community-based professional (e.g., a local emergency room doctor). Students moved eagerly from room to room, fascinated by the goriness and the anatomy and physiology instruction. After the event, the teacher who was the lead organizer—she had arranged the outside experts, coordinated with the local butcher, and planned learning goals for students—shared her excitement at having pulled off a great day. She was tired, but beaming. Teachers from her team thanked her for all of the work she had done, students expressed their excitement and outside professionals witnessed the type of work that this teacher did and that went on at King. All of this recognition was

part of what made “teaching less lonely”—fitting within and shaping the cultural practice of assessment at King.

Comfortably sharing one’s work has not always been the case at King. McCarthy said, as King shifted in the 1990s to a place where teachers’ work was made public, it was “horrifying to them...and now it’s just part of the culture.” This process was purposeful since part of the principal’s intention, as he enacted reform, was to stem teacher isolation and force teachers out of solitary confinement. Instead of a culture that tolerated and encouraged an ‘every teacher for herself/close your door’ mentality, McCarthy purposefully moved away from the loneliness felt by teachers (e.g., Lortie’s previously mentioned ‘egg carton’ phenomena). He said, “One of my original precepts was that teaching would become less lonely. And, it’s a very supportive environment when you’ve got to produce this expedition and it’s going to be public. It’s hard.” ‘Making teaching less lonely’ and ‘making teacher work public’ are intimately connected: the challenge of showcasing one’s work in front of other people—and willingly putting yourself in front of an audience - necessitates a certain type of collegiality among staff.

### Success Breeds Success

It’s that ‘success breeds success’ thing. You’re feeling it...then you’re willing to work harder...I think it makes the kids feel proud...the teachers are proud to work here...We’ve set a...professional standard in the building. It bothers people...if somebody is not living up to it.

In this quote, from a 20-year veteran teacher, several things about teachers *becoming* professionals at King are evident. First, “success breeds success” speaks to the process of how recognition of teacher work continually spawned higher quality work. Second, “being willing to work harder” implies a mechanism that bred success, one in which teachers individually and collectively—were inspired to roll up their sleeves and dig

in, rather than be satisfied with the status quo. Third, this process generated normative professional behaviors—“something to live up to”—that arose from, and was constantly reinforced, across the community.

An example of teachers building on their early achievements was how they made professional presentations, took professional development workshops, and led workshops for other teachers. As the same veteran teacher quoted above said:

Early on...we didn't have the success but [the principal] would...build in that by [saying], “Why don't you go to this conference” or “why don't you go see this school?” Even when we were presenting early on, we're like, “We're presenting *this?*”...All of that was helpful...It made you feel professional.

Over the years teachers have packaged what they do into professional development sessions, including workshops at the Expeditionary Learning Site Seminar and intensive week-long classes on successful expeditions for Expeditionary Learning. Teachers have also helped schools adopt similar school-wide practices. Being asked to share their work with outside, professional audiences, and helping develop other teachers' capacities, elevates the value of one's work and, in turn, feeds a cycle of continual achievement.

From David's perspective, the recognition that teachers individually and collectively received “allowed risk taking.” The freedom to innovate came from receiving accolades for their work. Staff gained value from recognition, including a sense of professionalism—having a story to tell that others paid attention to, in David's words, “increased participation in one's career.”

Another aspect of ‘becoming a professional’ and striving to improve one's practice over time—and how ‘making work public’ with peers fuels this – is evidenced in the following quote:



I've taught for 11 years. The first two or three years it was like, "I want to do this right..." People said... "What would you do differently next time to make it better?" There's a lot of revision in our work so when we reflect on our own work, which we do quite a bit...growth is getting out of your comfort zone.

This same teacher went on to say:

I'm not trying to put it on anymore, because I get it and I'm just doing a really good job...I'm trying to be honest and impeccable with my work and I'm just trying to be open and do the best I can do and not try to put on for people who are now looking.

In the above quote, his sense of himself as a teacher 'being peered into' changed over time. "Not putting it on anymore" is a vivid way to articulate the transition from rookie to professional at King. The process of actively working to be a better teacher through reflection and revision, of 'getting out of your comfort zone' is part of the cultural practice of assessment at King. That teachers engaged in practices that they also asked of their students provides synchronicity across different facets of the school.

#### Working with Outside Experts

A science teacher listed the following people and organizations he worked with in conjunction with recent expeditions:

- City of Portland
- City arborist
- US Forest Service
- University of Southern Maine
- Maine State Parks
- State geologist
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Presumscott River Watch
- Audubon Society
- Portland Water District
- Local wildlife artists
- Local oyster farmers

The teacher, who both relied on the above people's expertise and worked alongside them and with students, relished these opportunities, using them to engage

students with expert material. But, clearly he as a teacher benefited, too, from this collaboration. How did working with outside experts shape his and other teachers' sense of professionalism? Teachers shared their work with various professionals through collaborative efforts. They were exposed to content that they may not be experts in, increasing their knowledge of relevant subject matter. Through the curricular feature of students working with outside professionals, teachers' work at King therefore had a built-in audience; working with outside experts was one of the ways that teachers were recognized for their work.

Additionally, teachers had 'skin in the game' when they collaborated with outside professionals or community members. Not only were teachers providing opportunities for their students to do research, but they were doing that research, too. For example, in the Small Acts of Courage expedition, teachers took risks by having students interview people from the local community: teachers wanted the interviews to go well, not just for student learning, but for the sake of their own relationships with the interviewees. Their own credibility was on the line; if students did well, then teachers also 'looked good.'

Myself as a researcher 'peering into King' and teachers' work is also relevant here. David commented that my work elevated the sense of importance of his own work—paying close attention to his work allowed him to see his own work as worthy of analysis. He also said that other teachers benefited from being interviewed by me, again because of the sense of importance (i.e., recognition) that came with outside interest.

If teachers gain recognition and a sense of professionalism from working with outside professionals, in turn, how are outside professionals impacted by working with students and teachers at King? By working alongside students and teachers, these experts

have an audience, one that is different from those who typically view their work. For example, the Small Acts interviewees were students' experts and thus had a witness to their life stories. Student work can again be considered a boundary object, providing a link that otherwise would not connect the disparate worlds of 12 year old children, civil-rights activists, and teachers.

### Student Work as Teacher Work

Unlike professions in which a person's work is more directly their own, teachers' work is most often seen through what their students produce or achieve. At King, 'making student work public' often was one and the same as 'making teacher work public.' In many schools and corresponding public forums, 'student work' is academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores or grades. Test scores are shared prominently in newspapers such as the Boston Globe, where each fall, town-by-town results of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) are published. Test scores, in turn, are increasingly used to judge teacher quality, institutionalized through the recent federal Race to the Top competition. Without getting into a lengthy analysis, using test scores to measure teacher quality has been likened to "measuring temperature with a teaspoon" (Popham, as quoted in David & Cuban, 2010, p. 20)—inadequate for the complexity of the task. When products and performances of student work are shared publicly, the *practice* of judging teachers' work is quite different and a step closer to actually measuring temperature with a thermometer. At King this seemed to contribute to how teachers saw themselves as professionals.

Sharing tangible artifacts of students' academic engagement shaped teachers as professionals over time. McCarthy described this as part of his early intentions about making student work public:

We decided to have a Celebration of Learning...early on and it was horrible. I mean, about half of it was pretty good and the other half was just a bunch of...teachers who slapped some crap up. And it was public and then they realized, "Hmm, next year...I really looked bad" and that was purposeful...we're going to be public with this.

Putting student work into the public raised the bar for teachers—seeing what other teachers produced with their kids upped the ante for teachers who were not doing the same quality of work with their students. The high quality of student work, as discussed throughout my analysis, brought attention to King and specifically to the sense of professionalism among teachers. As the principal said:

Then you had something, "Look at this!" It just didn't exist in many schools. And so we started showing that all over the country, people started coming here, saying, "How did this happen?"

In respect to showcasing work nationally, McCarthy also believed that it was powerful for teachers to witness other teachers taking up *their* good work *and* making it better.

Interestingly, teachers did not readily acknowledge their work as being recognized—more often putting it back on the students—or onto King: it was *students* or the *school* who deserved the recognition. For example, several teachers when asked about the recognition they got from working with outside experts or other forms of students' performing their work, were at a loss to describe how this recognition shaped their own work. This seems to indicate humbleness among teachers and a belief in the collective good, not just their own individual accomplishments.

The following example demonstrates how one teacher described his work alongside community members. He ran an outdoor music festival in the spring, which simultaneously showcased student musicians and the teacher's own work—both as a musician and of his program at King. In this instance, he and the students had an audience and both performed in the community. He said,

We are having the professionals we respect most come and share their talents, see us perform, see our kids perform...it really makes us step up to the plate and raise the bar for us, too, as showing our work.

“Our work” refers to his work and his students’—they are in it together, in the public eye *together*—even if the teachers and students have different goals. In turn, knowing that teachers were also invested in the quality of their work shaped students’ participation. In reflecting on the Small Acts of Courage interviews Caitlin similarly said:

I was a wreck. Don’t be fooled. I know I told them, “You are representing King. You are representing Windsor 7, you are representing yourself.” I didn’t hide that from them either. I remember telling them...“We’re nervous, too.”

### Creating the Conditions in Which People Feel Valued

Part of what supported teachers ‘becoming professionals’ was an intentional and active process of creating a school environment in which staff felt valued. This included adjustments to the process of communication between teachers and administrators and larger school-wide efforts such as arranging the schedule in order for teacher teams to have 90 minutes of joint-planning time every other day. This culture rested on the principal’s concerted effort to treat teachers as professionals. He had a self-proclaimed “bias for yes” where he leaned toward the positive with teachers – if they asked for something or wanted to try something new, he tended to say yes. For example, he said:

The teachers feel that they are somewhat protected and it’s OK to try something fairly radical, even though when [a teacher] said, “I want to take 75 kids diving in

the ocean doing underwater photography in wetsuits”, I’m thinking how’re you going to get a Muslim girl into a wetsuit? ... That’s where the piece of “bias for yes” comes out.

By trusting teachers and allowing them to innovate – while also providing feedback when needed—the principal’s leadership was a particular example of how teachers developed their sense of professionalism.

Another important aspect of teachers ‘becoming professionals’ was how people’s job descriptions evolved over time. As teachers developed skills and as the needs of King changed, staff often had a hand in shaping their job. Sometimes this was smaller shifts; other times it was wrapped up into larger change in the building. For example, as one teacher said after several years in the same position, “I was ready to spread my wings” and move into a different role; however, at the time, an appropriate new role did not exist. Given the timing of one person leaving, the needs of the school, and the direction in which he wanted to expand, the principal decided to morph an existing Related Arts class into the previously described Scientific Communications course.

Part of ‘creating conditions’ was establishing a collaborative culture. As previously discussed, when McCarthy became principal, though there were pockets of collaboration, staff generally did not work together. A veteran King teacher described the climate among staff throughout the early days of reform:

Think of the worst possible name someone could call you and then have four or five people standing in your face all mimicking the same expletives...[people] that you thought were colleagues because you’ve been in the building and working with them.

To garner support for his vision of reform and to ‘make teaching less lonely,’ McCarthy intentionally fostered a collaborative staff culture. One of the first things he did in the late 1980s and early 1990s was to send teachers on Outward Bound retreats. These courses

are remembered as instigators of change among staff relationships. A teacher who recounted these courses with great fondness said,

Everyone was a little cynical about teambuilding... But [the Outward Bound retreats] opened up communication. When you are standing out in 40 degree November rain, belaying somebody on the side of a rock and that person would not be out in the rain, period, never mind being on a side of a rock. It creates a vehicle for more honest and open conversation – it breaks down those barriers and gets rid of some of the defensiveness... People are a little more comfortable.

This same teacher said that because of these efforts, “hallway conversations” slowly started shifting away from griping about students and other teachers and toward collegial chats about teaching and learning.

Another way that collaboration and buy-in were fostered early on was McCarthy’s decision to put all teachers on one of four action teams. These committees comprised the School Improvement team, and included the following: (1) Flexible Scheduling; (2) Parent and Community Involvement; (3) Alternatives for Students; and (4) Middle School Structures and Curriculum. As a school, when time was allotted for work on reform efforts, all teachers had a designated role.

Collaboration was intimately tied to developing reform practices over time. A veteran teacher spoke of the administrative support:

The first couple of years we did expeditions you look back on them and say, “That was a pretty good idea but ... it wasn’t a model that was perfected yet.” Kind of walking in the dark. But one of the first things we did as a team that [the principal] supported, was we took two days of planning ... where we went off site as a team and we did curriculum mapping ... And that was very helpful...to have the administration on board and say what you are going to do.

One teacher described his own view of the current collaborative culture. He said,

What do you need to [work here]? You need patience. You need to be able to flex and not break...and be a team player and it’s hard sometimes teaching with four other people....And then there’s like six or nine or twelve and then there’s all of us...And then there’s just you...the configuration goes on and on... We’re a tight

staff and [the principal] has allowed us to have experiences as staff to build our relationships.

His words capture the sense of the endless configurations of ‘working together’ at King: from being on your own to inevitably being part of the ‘whole’ of King. The principal’s role is evident here as well.

### Summary

In this theme, my analysis of the cultural practice of assessment centers on teachers. Although ultimately schooling at King was about student learning, it is important to consider the impact of school-level assessment practices on teachers. At King, teachers were proud of their work and their school and most seemed to genuinely enjoy their jobs. Teachers regularly interacted with local experts, had opportunities for professional development, and participated in leadership of the school. The staff turnover rate was almost zero and it was competitive to get hired at King. That teachers got recognized – in part via the tangible artifacts of student work– was an important aspect of King’s cultural practice of assessment.

The ‘becoming a professional’ theme demonstrates teacher recognition as different than in more typical schools (i.e., being named ‘teacher of the month’ and receiving a privileged parking spot). In other words, teachers—not just students—have opportunities to be acknowledged for their contributions to the school’s and community’s wellbeing. In Interlude #5, I show teachers from the Small Acts of Courage expedition as certain kinds of professionals, where the usual roles of teachers are transformed through ‘making student work public’ into directors and producers.



### Interlude #5: Preparing for Small Acts of Courage Performances

In this interlude I describe the ways that students and teachers prepared together for public performances during the Small Acts of Courage expedition, showing the range of ‘performing the role of a teacher’ at King. I share the words that teachers used to help students get ready for a performance as well as glimpses of what occurred during rehearsals. In particular, note how ‘audience’ is invoked by teachers to spur students’ participation. I share three instances: (1) B-block’s in-class rehearsal for the Culminating Event; (2) Windsor House’s final rehearsal before the Culminating Event; and (3) Windsor House presenting their work to the Glickman library’s special collection.

#### In-class Rehearsal

Twelve days before the culminating event, and immediately after an on-stage whole-grade-level rehearsal, students returned to their class and once again did a run-through. Each student practiced his or her lines, focusing also on posture, tone, loudness and timing. Before starting the rehearsal, Caitlin asked the group, “Who can remember one of the main things we are going to focus on today when we’re up there?” Answers from students and Caitlin included: “Listening for the last word of the person before you”; “what you should look like if you are frozen on stage; and “what don’t you want to look like when you are frozen on stage.” As students came to the podium and delivered their lines, Caitlin gave them feedback by using gestures as they spoke, such as covering her ears to get them to speak louder or using her hands to indicate ‘slow down.’ Students took this rehearsal seriously—when it wasn’t their turn, students quietly listened to each other. There also was a light-hearted tone. For example, when one student, after saying

her lines, returned to her place on ‘stage’ in a clumsy manner, Caitlin said, “Don’t take out half the crowd when you walk back.” Students laughed.

When one student was reluctant to get up and practice his part, Caitlin tried to encourage his participation. The following exchange occurred:

Caitlin – You have a good story. You have a <i>good</i> part of her story.
Steven – No. I don’t like mine.
Class – [laughter]
Steven – [Quickly reads through his lines]
Caitlin – Now Steven, she <i>loves</i> that story. Do you remember her telling it?
Steven – Yeah.
Caitlin – Again and again and again.
Student – She told it like five times. [this student was part of the same interview team]
Caitlin – She <i>loved</i> that story and so when you’re up there on stage, it’s your opportunity to share how much she loved that with the whole audience as well. OK? So, you’ve got a good story. Remember how much enthusiasm she brought.

Another critical feature of this rehearsal was the attention paid to supporting each other.

At one point Caitlin said,

Now for those of us in this group who are leaving their comfort zone by a huge stretch here—it’s like when we were at Camp Kieve<sup>20</sup> and we did something that was a little scary for us, but we all had the support of each other. So, we are all here to support each other. And if you are nervous about coming up and speaking, that’s why we are doing this practicing. OK? We are here to support one another.

This was both a message for those who felt nervous, as well as their fellow students who were watching—be supportive! Right before a student who clearly struggled with speaking in front of an audience (he had recently been mainstreamed from the self-contained ELL class), got to the podium, Caitlin said, “We support you.” After he finished his lines, Caitlin gave him a big smile and quietly, though vigorously, clapped for him. This intensive support was shown for several students.

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<sup>20</sup> This is a reference to the three-day retreat that 7<sup>th</sup> graders went on in the fall to a local outdoor education center.

Later on, after one girl read through her lines, the following exchange took place:

Caitlin – Now, that last piece is a really powerful quote from her, or a part of her story. So, share that sentiment of hers with us. ‘Cause you end it, don’t you?

Michelle – Yeah.

Caitlin – That’s a good way – that word ‘equality’ that’s what all of this is about.

Michelle – Want me to do it again?

Caitlin – The last sentence. Or two sentences. A natural place.

Michelle – The last sentence? The one with the quote?

Caitlin – Yeah.

Michelle - Oh. OK. [reads her line, but doesn’t emphasize the last word]

Caitlin – Say that word, “Equality.” [said articulating each syllable]

Michelle – Equality. [said sort of plainly]

Class – [laughter]

Caitlin – But with some strength in your voice.

In this exchange, Caitlin guided the student’s manner of speaking, in hopes of highlighting key aspects of the story—aspects that would help get the message across to the audience about the classes’ overall learning about civil rights.

After running through all of the speaking roles, students gave each other feedback. One student comment was, “Don’t look embarrassed if you mess up your lines.” Caitlin then added a few comments about what to do if you make a mistake; she also told students to practice at home by saying, “That’s your homework.” At the end of the rehearsal, one student said, “If we get this good is that an ‘A’ for us?” Caitlin’s response, in an attempt to shift the focus away from grades was, “You’ll be my favorite student.” In a nod to my observational presence that day, Caitlin turned to me and said, “Do you have any feedback for them?” I responded by telling them to project their voices more.

### Final Dress Rehearsal

The day before the Culminating Event, all 80 students and their teachers did a full run-through of their performance. During this rehearsal, Karen and Caitlin were more like directors of a play than typical classroom teachers. Their attention was focused on stage presence, timing of the music and video, and tone and pace of speakers. As the rehearsal got started, Karen said, “Come down quietly—let’s pretend like it’s tomorrow. We have guests coming. How many of you have parents who are coming?”

Attention was given to all components of the Culminating Event, not just the stage performance. Students were told what would happen after the performance and what their specific role would be, including bringing their interviewee to the library, looking at their group’s artwork, and introducing their interviewee to their parents if present.

Throughout this rehearsal it was clear that ‘audience’ mattered. After one student’s final line, which was, “...thanks to the NAACP.” Karen quickly jumped and said, “Let’s hear that last line, which was great.” The student came back to the microphone and repeated the line in a much clearer and louder voice, “Thanks to the NAACP.” Karen then said, “Great. Good. We’ve got a lot of people in that audience who have worked hard for the NAACP.” Teachers here show their awareness of audience and help craft the students’ performance to meet the audience’s perceived needs.

At the end, a few critical comments were given to all students: “You are not to be yawning on stage. Think of the people you interviewed. They would probably be insulted if they see that as you’re sharing [their story].” Karen also said,

Make it worth it for them to give time out of their day. So, that’s your responsibility for tomorrow. They’re taking time out of their day, make sure what

you say about them is clear and loud and said with the respect that every one of these people deserves. OK?

Caitlin's final words were:

We've worked so hard to get to this point. We have the books in our possession as we speak. They are amazing. Tomorrow is our final presentation and it is our celebration of all of the hard work we did. So, let's make sure we all give it our best tomorrow so you can feel so good about what we've done.

These last few statements from Karen and Caitlin differentiate their role from typical teachers: here their role is to give feedback regarding content and stage presence, while instilling an awareness of the audience. This is not your standard, everyday definition of a teacher.

### Glickman Library

The week after the Culminating Event, and the week before going to the library to present their books, Caitlin described their upcoming trip to the B-block class. She said:

Next Friday...we are all going to walk up to the Glickman Library...They are accepting our four volumes of our oral histories and they are making them part of that library. So, at our Culminating Event we shared and presented our work and celebrated our work with each other and with our interviewees and with our parents. And now next Friday we are going to be presenting it to a larger community that we aren't even really necessarily going to see. We are giving this to the special collections...they put out a press release for the media to come and they have invited some people on the board of the special collections...we are going to present our work to them and they are going to have some refreshments for us...It is a special event, so if you'd like to dress up.

In this quote Caitlin describes the importance of presenting their books, reinforcing the overall purpose of students' work in this expedition. In particular, she emphasizes the wider audience – one that will largely be unknown—and the staging of this event.

A member of the special collections board, an African American woman, accepted the books. In her acceptance speech she said to the crowded room of 80 7<sup>th</sup> graders, "Do you see yourselves as slightly different than when you started? ... I am

blown away...I moved to Maine in 1966...Maine is a unique place...we were *the* Black family [in the small town we moved to]..." She went on to say,

As I look at your faces and I know that...you are at the age of defining your lives. You have options I did not have because of the color of my skin. Did you realize that in what you were studying? And to some extent, some of you in this room have skin like mine, or even richer—notice that word—*richer* in color than mine. To some extent your experience is still modulated and modified by the pigment of your skin—I want to give you courage that things do get better and things are better because of people like you, taking the time to study, learn and understand. Would that be true? [a few mumbled responses from students] Let me hear? [loud chorus of 'yeses' from students] That thing I want you to bear in mind, that pebble dropping into that pond has an ever-expanding circle...

There are elements in her speech that show the kind of recognition that students received for their work. This woman, who grew up in Arkansas, and had been considered by her parents as a possible member of the Little Rock Nine, said to these students, "Things are better because of people like you." This was a poignant moment for many students.

After the event, when asked about the significance of presenting their work to the library, Michael said,

I feel like today was one of the most important days of the expedition because we finally get to show our work and we get to share it to the collection so people all around the world can learn about civil rights – they can just come here and check it out or watch the video.

When asked why he thought this was important he said, "I feel like all our hard work paid off and I feel like they'll really appreciate it here. And they probably need it here more than we need it." When asked if anything the speaker said resonated with him he said,

The whole pond metaphor [the rippling out]—it was strong and I understood it really quickly. I agreed with her and she had very strong words to share with us and I was glad that she did. She told us how we have our whole lives ahead, the whole pond metaphor, and just everything she said it felt like it came from her heart and she really meant it.

Although Michael's work was recognized by Gerald Talbot, he shows here how other people's words impacted his own impression of the importance of his, and his classmates,' work.

### Summary

In this interlude, teachers' discourse highlights important aspects of getting ready for performances and sharing their work with an audience. Teachers became more like stage directors and event managers. There is a sense that teachers and students are in it together, that each is working toward flawless performances and doing right by the audiences. Comments from both Karen and Caitlin demonstrate their awareness of audience and how the performance was shaped with audience members in mind.

Additionally, the more abstract notion of making a contribution via their four-volume collection is conveyed—some students clearly adopt this way of thinking about their work. In two ways, then, students' work has an impact: through their performance and the durable artifact of their books.

### Using the Developmental Approach

In this final theme I return to a discussion of King's approach to the development of school-wide instructional practices since 1988. I explore the following sub-themes: the conditions necessary for initial reform efforts, sticking with one major reform over time, constantly improving school-wide practices, administrative support for improving reform practices, and specific negotiations among staff about curricular practices. Throughout this section, I highlight the cultural practice of assessment that buoyed and shaped King's continual process of reform.

The majority of school reform efforts are short lived, whether focused on system-wide, whole-school, or classroom-based change (David & Cuban, 2010). Because King stuck with one overarching reform for over 20 years, it is worth examining factors that have sustained *this* reform over time. Broadly speaking, the process at King with the most holding power was not any one practice, policy or person. Instead it was an almost philosophical approach to reform. David called it "using the developmental approach," which referred to slowly making sense of reform over time—always expecting to get better, while assuming that 'great' could be reached by building on accomplishments. In this sense reform at King was a one-school version of what Tyack and Cuban (1995) called "tinkering toward utopia." These authors ask the question, "How might one go about improving schools from the inside out, a kind of adaptive tinkering that preserves what is valuable and remedies what is not" (p. 136)? A long-time teacher at King described it this way:

You can't take the issue of reform and say, "Alright. We're going to package it up into this nice little commercial package and we're going to be able to slide it...right here in your school around everything else that you're doing." It's not going to work.



However, as King adopted specific changes, the success felt by some spurred wider adoption of expeditionary practices: there was a general belief that as a school, they were still working out the process of implementing high-quality learning expeditions, while aiming toward academic achievement for all students.

### Principal's Support for Reform

One of the most critical features of King's reform was the principal's staying power. It was not just that Mike McCarthy has been the principal of King since 1988, or that he was widely respected inside and outside of King: his 'sticking-with-it-ness' in transforming King from a tracked to an untracked school—and using Expeditionary Learning as a vehicle for school change—is rare in the history of school reform in the United States. His unwavering support for innovation and his willingness to take flak on behalf of the school for proposed and instituted changes created conditions in which reform thrived. Despite opposition from “powerful parents” and resistant teachers, he acknowledged from the beginning that change was hard and that he would not alter his course. Along these lines, McCarthy said:

One thing Expeditionary Learning does, and that I try to do, too, is to protect us from the innovation du jour—the ‘big idea’...at the central office. We just say, “We don't do that— we're Expeditionary Learning.”

I already discussed McCarthy's “bias for yes” in which he tended toward affirming teachers. He was also partial toward professional development and teachers themselves presenting their work. Another way to describe this is as a bias toward trusting staff versus “being the heavy” and toward telling teachers what they were doing well instead of what they were doing wrong. Although a few criticized his approach for

being too hands off, the leeway he gave fostered the conditions in which teachers contributed toward ‘best practices’ for themselves and the school. For example, by encouraging, rather than constricting, innovation, teachers continually worked to expand their own and the school’s understanding of high-quality expeditions.

In discussing his overall approach to working with teachers, McCarthy said:

The goal for a teacher and for a group of teachers is autonomy...even when they are screwing up. But, when they do screw up you gotta be honest with them.... I think we trust each other that I think it’s going to get better. You have to have that positive intention...Now there’s so much internal support and willingness to give feedback to each other.

Here McCarthy describes a critical component of his philosophy that shaped the ways that teachers worked toward collective reform practices.

#### Developing Expeditionary Practices

As Scott Hartl<sup>21</sup>, current President and CEO of Expeditionary Learning, said, “When [EL] came in, King was working on a series of things that built to Expeditionary Learning, and were really clearly the...shoulders upon which EL stood.” Tracing back to who King was and the reform initiatives at the school and the district level, there was a confluence of factors that ‘allowed’ the whole-school reform practices of Expeditionary Learning to take hold—and vigorously thrive - over time. For example, King was already working with Outward Bound to build staff collaboration, and establish vision, prior to King stepping up as an Expeditionary Learning demonstration school. Also, King worked with a local university professor, whose approach to curriculum design fit with many aspects of learning expeditions.

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<sup>21</sup> Hartl was King’s first ‘school designer’ – a person at EL who works with schools to implement the whole-school reform model. This person is a consultant, coach and leader of professional development throughout a school.

Hartl also said that as King became an Expeditionary Learning school, “There was an incredible process of evolving, kind of moving target, kind of figure it out as we go... it was more like a public art installment–performance art.” Instead of one clear vision of what the process would look like—as historical remembrances tend to smooth over—Hartl said that the vision evolved over time. As staff bought into, evolved, and implemented the vision, this ‘moving target’ became more defined; though, even today, King is continually evolving their practice.

Tyack and Cuban (1995) ask the question, “how do schools change reforms” rather than the more typical question, “how do reforms change schools” (p. 60). In the case of King, the former question is appropriate. Because King began adopting Expeditionary Learning alongside the emergence of the organization *and* the model, the school (as well as the other pilot schools) innovated reforms as they were implemented. McCarthy said:

We developed learning expeditions with [EL]. In some ways we were the break-through school. A lot of schools spent more time on...culture and more on the design principles but [they] didn’t work on, “How do you teach this way? What does it look like?” Learning expeditions were undefined – “Voyages into the unknown.” There’s a big shit load of help. So, we and a couple of really smart teachers – actually developed the first learning expedition.

Hartl confirmed this saying, “The early days of EL were very non-explicit.” The openness of the model, while making it challenging to figure out what exactly it meant to “do” Expeditionary Learning, created a climate in which teachers had to be discovery-oriented, had to engage in trial and error to make progress, and allowed for reform to look a bit like ‘performance art.’ The following quote from an early implementing teacher describes the process of making incremental progress:

I also remember Scott Hartl coming and I'd [say], "Is this right?"... There was this sense of we didn't really know, but the kids were producing really nice work and they were caring about their work, so it felt like we were on the right track, but we weren't sure and I don't think [EL was] sure.

This teacher went on to say:

I remember Scott coming with his camera all the time taking pictures of [student work]. And then we did the books...about South America. They did children's books [and] it ended up evolving into the EL Summer thing on Boston. So again, lots of time, lots of materials, lots of support to do the product... That's sort of how we kept sticking our toe in.

Part of the above quote shows how "kids producing really nice work" shaped 'the developmental approach.' Additionally, people, from outside King, were involved in this process, for the sake of King and for the larger network of current and potential EL schools. As Hartl says about this period, "I was on an ever-present quest for models. The best tool I had was to document best practices and bring them as models to another place and to try to ratchet that up." Hartl described himself at this time as a "national pollinator"—traveling the country, going from school to school, using examples of student work from King (and other schools) to convey the process and outcomes of the EL model.

In another sense, 'developmental' meant the amount of time it took to *consistently* implement instructional practices at King. The same teacher who used the 'turning the battleship analogy' for witnessing change, said:

The other thing that has changed is...our slow adoption of expeditionary learning. It's hard talking with people who come in—they walk around the building, they go, "Wow, how do we get this?"...Over the course of 10, 12 years it started to evolve, and then you start polishing it. And, we say, "what's next?" It's a very slow process.

His sense of it taking 12 years to evolve it, *then* they started polishing it, speaks to the slow, steady and purposeful enactment of reform.

King's evolution of expeditionary practices is evidenced through the creation and use of the Six Step Planning and Debrief Rubric (see Appendix G) for learning expeditions. This document was a guide for teaching teams as they planned; it also served as a 'debriefing tool' at the end of expeditions. The descriptions of each category convey expectations of successful expeditions. It was an ever-changing document, evolving as practices evolved. For example, in 2007, this document contained four steps (the "Four Steps that Precede the Kickoff" document) instead of the present six. The six-step document now includes two additional categories: "Developing a Compelling Topic" and the final step of "Planning for a Culminating Event."

More recent changes to the document included a greater emphasis on 'learning' and a slight move away from the final product. In a December, 2010 leadership meeting, administrators attempted to answer the question, "Where does assessment go?" on the document. The response from one school leader was, "It depends on how people *use* the document," demonstrating the connection between people's actions and possible changes. A specific suggestion was to change from 'Targeting Learning and Knowledge' to 'Learning Targets,' mirroring their upcoming school-wide adoption of learning targets.

At the end of an expedition, each team reflected on the positives and negatives of the expedition. To do this thoroughly, teachers, with the help of a school leader, used the Six Step Debrief Rubric to evaluate each component. The notes taken helped in planning the next expedition – and determined whether or not that specific expedition would be used again, revised, or put aside.

### ‘Being Like Fascia’

Part of what sustained reform at King was the leadership team’s ability to provide support that was felt, but was not obtrusive. Accordingly, David described his job as “being like fascia.” He said that sometimes it was hard to define his role and that at the end of some days he was not always sure what he had specifically accomplished. However, he knew that he supported the process of implementing high quality expeditions and was always cognizant of “where are we heading as a [school-wide] practice.”

One specific way that David worked with teachers was to help them “work backward with time,” developing a “work flow” for upcoming expeditions. The planning document mentioned above was in part designed to help people work backward from *what* they wanted students to produce (products and performances) and *when* they wanted it to be completed (i.e., the Culminating Event).

One perennial issue at King was teaching teams that launched an expedition without knowing what the step-by-step processes and products of student work would be. For example, a day of fieldwork would be planned, though it might not be clear how this day fit into the larger plan of what students would produce or perform in the expedition. David wondered in these cases: Are students properly prepared to get the most out of the fieldwork experience? Will the fieldwork serve the larger goals of the expedition? Part of what sometimes fueled this dilemma was a gap between a teacher’s overall understanding of a learning expedition and their ability to plan and execute high-quality expeditions.

In response to a specific instance, David worked with one teacher to design a final product and performance that would be in alignment with the overall goals of her

expedition. Refining the particulars of the end result created a way to discuss the overall plan for the expedition. The two went back and forth: David made suggestions, the teacher considered them. Over the span of several meetings, slowly the expedition took shape. In this case, instead of having the class create one movie, students worked in small groups, each creating their own short movie, with the slate of movies ultimately ‘hanging together’ as one. The consultative conversations between David and this teacher were also about *how* students were going to build the skills they needed to be successful and how much time each step would reasonably take. As discussed in the ‘performing student work’ theme, this involved encouraging the teacher to make a product exemplar and share it with her students.

#### Working with Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning

The process of adopting expeditionary practices, and the incremental approach to change, cannot adequately be discussed without a more detailed look at how King, over time, worked with Outward Bound and Expeditionary Learning. In the late 1980s, as McCarthy began to institute reform, he invited teachers on the previously mentioned Outward Bound courses. Looking back, he said that these courses were about “working together to do something you didn’t think you could do” which he adopted as a metaphor for changing the school. In the first year, only six teachers agreed to participate, despite having a grant for 25; in the second and third years 15 participated each year. Of the teachers from the first group, five of the six still remain at King. These courses, as discussed in the ‘becoming a professional’ theme, contributed to a shift in the culture of staff interactions.

As stated earlier, King and EL developed expeditionary practices *together*. Over the years, King and EL have continued to collaborate in the following ways:

- Teachers from King leading week-long EL institutes—based on two highly successful expeditions at King—Sparks of Liberty and Fading Footprints
- Hosting annual two-day Site Seminars, which showcase King as well as the Expeditionary Learning design
- Teachers attending EL institutes and implementing successful expeditions based on the courses that became national models (e.g., Caitlin and Karen attending the civil rights institute in Little Rock, Arkansas in summer of 2009)
- David combining his movie-making skills with his passion for consulting with teachers into a new role: producing short educational films for EL about specific practices—such as learning targets—to be used in professional development sessions
- King’s new role within the EL’s Mentor School network

It is clear that King and EL have benefited from their ongoing relationship: EL holding King up as a model school and King relying on expansive knowledge of school reform from EL’s school designers and administrators. The future of this relationship suggests a continued supporting of King’s developmental process, specifically in the school-wide adoption of student-engaged assessment practices, which was rolled out in the summer of 2011.

### Historical Residue

The history of previous expeditions—both positive and negative aspects of student learning, teacher collaboration, and classroom practices—carry forward into ‘using the developmental approach’ in specific expeditions. This historical residue sometimes created affordances while at other times presented dilemmas; prior success or failure was brought forward in subtle ways that could impede or support the process. For example, many expeditions evolved considerably over time, yet their cores remained identifiable.



The positive and less effective features of expeditions were carried forward by people who had worked on expeditions across time, as they moved in and out of different teaching teams. In other instances, precedents that were set by a previous group manifested in how it was built on and improved. In one case, an expedition de-volved, slowly losing steam, as key people left and priorities shifted. David referenced a particular expedition, noting that it “has been historically hard to capture” via documentaries - the chunks were not discrete or definable—and the ruts, which only seemed to deepen over time, were hard to overcome.

There was also historical residue in how teachers and administrators interacted with each other. An example of how this applied to ‘using the developmental approach’ was when David made a comment to a team that he “liked the adventure component” of their plan for the final performance and product of student work, which sounded to me like a complement; however, to the team it apparently could have come across as a “dig.” Historically, David had worked with this team to develop what having the adventure component meant; he had sometimes been critical of their efforts for lacking this curricular feature.

In summary, the moment-to-moment successes at King can be seen as solitary events; however, at its core, ‘using the developmental approach’ more accurately is a building-up of moments across 23 years of school change. When carried forward, these moments of success continually feed changes to individual and school-wide practices.

#### ‘Ready Fire Aim’

Another tension in ‘using the developmental approach’ was what David described as a “bias toward spontaneity:” there was a tendency at King toward the “ready fire aim”

approach of planning and executing learning expeditions. The ‘ready fire aim’ approach was fueled by a desire to take advantage of newly provided resources. For example, an expedition might get logistically bound to having students ready to culminate on a specific day because of being associated with a pre-planned community event, such as the First Friday Art Walk in Portland. In cases like these, David said that the deadline supplanted the learning targets by distracting teachers from the progress students made on the content-based outcomes.

Often times teachers were drawn toward what Wiggins and McTighe (2005) call ‘hands on but not minds on’ learning—that the fun of the activity guided curriculum design rather than the academic learning. David believed that activity should be connected to learning and the current push toward using learning targets across the school was a concrete move toward a synergy between activity and learning. Activity was at the expense of learning, though sometimes it was the other way around: learning at the expense of activity. For example, occasionally expeditions looked a lot like traditional school, with little fieldwork—or fieldwork being more like field trips - or a lack of compelling, local problems. In these cases the “adventure component” was left out in service of standardized curricular goals.

Because of the twice-a-year cycle of kicking off and culminating learning expeditions, there was a predictable rhythm to the academic year at King. David said that “the chaos of King in those last three weeks” before a Culminating Event were often spent rushing to complete work and getting students up to speed on the skills they needed to complete products. During the final days, everyone involved – teachers, students, support staff–scurried around finishing products and rehearsing. Regular schedules often

shifted to preparing for the Culminating Event. During these times, David's room had a particular frenziedness about it—media crew members ran in, put finishing touches on their movies or students and teachers came in to grab cameras or microphones.

As one teacher described it:

The schedule is insane...it's a hectic place. But it's an active and positive place... it can definitely get overwhelming. But one good thing about that flexibility...if I have a big performance coming up, I'm almost always able to pull kids out of class, say "OK, we need to work on this because we have a performance in two days."

He went on to say, "there's elements of that which make it a little bit like a potential wild fire." On a day-to-day basis, teachers worked within a fast-paced, flexible environment, that sometimes belied a scoped and sequenced approach to curriculum.

### Summary

Over the years, King's adoption of innovative reforms was supported by 'using the developmental approach.' Instead of seeing whole-school change as an all or nothing endeavor, teachers and administrators worked collaboratively to implement - and subsequently define and refine—the vision. Always considering their work 'under improvement' allowed for constant tweaking of the model. The school was always 'tinkering towards utopia.'

Several tensions were evident in 'using the developmental approach.' There were tensions between structure and free-form; between edicts and ground-up change; between figuring it out for yourself and getting input from the team; between autonomy and collaboration; between creating new, or using old, expeditions; between teaching being an "art" and something that can be parceled out and learned step-by-step. In the end, as teachers worked within these dilemmas, the cultural practice of assessment facilitated

collaboration within and across teams, and contributed to believing in their own capacity to change and improve. There was a culture of sharing, giving each other feedback and of making ‘teacher work’ public that fostered a constant adapting of the model.

As one teacher put it, the ‘developmental approach’ could be summarized as “even if you can’t control the wind, you can control the sails.” He said:

But there is certainly a lot of work that can be done on even the best expedition. Because topics change, kids change, teachers change, standards change, assessment changes, so you are constantly working with the wind... “You can’t control the wind, but you can control the sails.”

### Interlude #6: Delivering the Keynote

In this final interlude, I start as I began, returning to the opening vignette. In March 2011, four 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from King Middle School delivered a keynote presentation to 800 educators at the Expeditionary Learning National Conference, in Portland, Oregon. The students were invited to share the story of their class' exemplary work the previous year in their multi-month investigation of local individuals' contributions to the Civil Rights Movement – and to share King's story. The students' work, alongside their teachers, to prepare and execute a remarkable 30-minute presentation, exemplifies 'making student work public,' the recognition that befalls students and teachers, the subsequent 'and the legend grows' about King, and the hard work students and teachers put into achieving excellence.

The four selected to deliver the keynote were hard-working students who represented the diversity of King: a White girl, an Armenian-American boy, a Somali immigrant boy, and a Latina girl. Their diversity was highlighted as part of the speech; as students one-by-one greeted the audience they did so by introducing themselves in their first languages.

Students were given the job of 'telling the story' of Small Acts of Courage and of their school. During the keynote, students recounted their school's history while also describing their learning about the Civil Rights Movement. Their performance included a well-coordinated collaborative speech, excerpts of student-produced documentary video about their investigation and photos and stories about their interviewees.

The keynote was well received, gaining them multiple standing ovations. Afterwards, Scott Hartl said to the audience, clearly moved, "I'll say only this: your

stories and the way you tell them represent the best of EL. I have hope for a world that has the four of you in it."

Students' preparation was extensive and began four months prior to their speech. Their process included the following—the result of their teachers' ability to 'work backward with time' and gear students toward high-quality work:

- In December, Karen and Caitlin were special guests at a Windsor 8 House Meeting (a weekly meeting of all 8<sup>th</sup> grade Windsor students and teachers) at which they shared the news of students being asked to deliver the keynote. They emphasized that their collective, high-quality work was being recognized at the national level. The teachers announced which four students they had selected to go to Portland—as each name was said there was applause and what seemed like genuine excitement for these students. The 80 students were told that they would be the audience for a dress rehearsal and they would get to give feedback to the presenting students.
- Students met with their teachers after school starting in December to plan the content and flow of their speech. They started by watching a video of the previous year's student-led keynote at this conference. This exemplar was a lot to live up to.
- Throughout their preparation, students and teachers were very aware of their audience. Students wanted to know: Who would be in the audience? What do teachers want to hear about?
- Students continued to meet with their teachers every Thursday after school from early January through March. In addition to these weekly meetings, they held extra sessions on several Saturdays and during their February vacation.
- Planning sessions were a combination of practicing tone, poise and pacing as well as line-by-line (sometimes word-by-word) modification of the speech's text. From the beginning these sessions were a team approach—teachers and students in it together, crafting content and giving each other feedback. During rehearsals, Karen and Caitlin made changes, as determined by the group, to the master in the moment—after a change was made a student would run out of the room to pick up the new version—this happened at least five times during one of the sessions I attended. The tone at these sessions was both serious and fun—all knew they had a great responsibility ahead of them, but they clearly enjoyed the process.
- Two weeks before the conference, the students did a dress rehearsal in front of a 100-person audience that included their 8<sup>th</sup> grade peers and other invited guests. The four students said they were more nervous about this performance than they were about the conference presentation. Audience members were given slips of

paper on which to write their positive and constructive feedback. [See Appendix I for a list of this feedback.] Karen told the audience that this was the students' first time in front of an audience; Caitlin added that the students on the stage should feel the support of the audience, and that students should be "giving us their best as an audience." Afterwards, students eagerly read through the feedback, highlighting the pieces that they specifically wanted to work on. They also got specific input from the principal.

- At the conference, students practiced their speech several more times, including in the ballroom, up on stage using the microphones.

Their keynote went off beautifully. Each student had memorized all of their lines, they knew their cues, and seamlessly flowed among their spoken words, the videos, the music and the digital photographs.

Although students were the ones actually up on the stage, there was a direct impact on Caitlin and Karen. Teachers had a large hand in shaping the process—they did not do the work for students, but they were deeply invested in helping students be successful. Karen expressed that it was "frightening" to be on display via the work of students: *their* work was also being peered into. From the beginning of the practice sessions, the teachers were focused on doing a good job and being ready: from the start the teachers felt that they were behind and running out of time.

Not only did this expedition seem to never end, but in some ways, these students' keynote was also never ending: (1) Two months after the conference, students were asked to deliver their keynote again—this time to the Site Seminar participants; (2) a video of the students' keynote was on the King's and Expeditionary Learning's website homepage; (3) Scott Hartl, in November 2011, at the International Association for Experiential Education Conference, during his own keynote address, used snippets from the video of the students' presentation to tell a new roomful of 500 educators about the power of students' work; and (4) my own writing, here, about their experience.

## Summary

Students delivering a keynote speech, to 800 educators, 3000 miles from home, represents an ultimate example of what can happen when students share their work with outside audiences. That their work had a significant and lasting impact on the local community and, through this keynote address, on educators from around the country is a remarkable example of students gaining recognition for their academic work. Their work mattered. Through this event, the reputation of King grew, teachers were directly acknowledged for their hard work, and students felt enormous pride in themselves and their classmates. To see these students ‘stand a head taller’ before, during and after this event was a profound experience for me, for their teachers, their families and for many of the other audience members.

In several ways, thinking about student work as boundary objects helps understand this extraordinary example. First, students used pieces of media that they and other students created about their learning expedition to prepare for, and as components of, their keynote—including the published books, the documentary videos, and digital photographs. Using prior work as tools for future creations is an example of how student-created work was utilized as a resource to produce new, valued tools. Second, their speech, as a product and performance of student work (in the moment and as a video artifact afterwards) was the way information was shared between students/teachers and educators from around the country. Thus, teachers used student work as a tool to expand their understanding of what it could mean for students to engage in meaningful academic work via learning expeditions.



Students used their own work (i.e., previously created artifacts) both in their future work *and* saw their work taken up and used in a professional setting, transforming the way these students saw themselves. They became community members – teachers of teachers – through their work. Their contributions mattered; people took notice of their work. This way of ‘performing school that matters’ showcases the potential power that lies within schools like King.

## CHAPTER 9

### SUMMARY OF THEORY-BUILDING

In this, my final analytical chapter, I highlight processes that are relevant across all six themes. My aim is to glean mid-level theoretical meaning across the interplay of timescales and grain sizes while doing what Charmaz (2006) calls moving “between local worlds and larger social structures” (p. 133). Here I synthesize the cultural practice of assessment through, and across, themes and interludes. More specifically, I focus on the dilemmas between implementing and sustaining innovative reforms within a standards and accountability-based climate that propelled King’s institutional agency and the engagement of students through, and because of, a certain kind of cultural practice of assessment. I emphasize the role of ‘purposefully making work public’ and how this is at the center of ‘performing school that matters.’

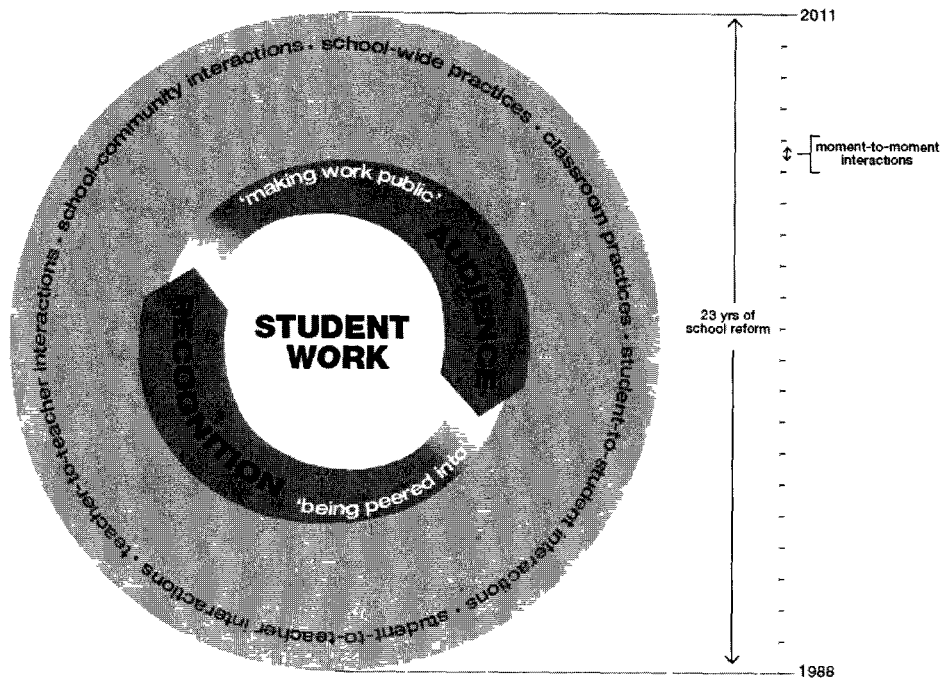
#### Recognition and Audience

When examined across themes, recognition and audience are at the heart of what makes King “King.” In this section, I look at the ways recognition and audience ‘mattered’ at different grain sizes and across scales of time. Overall, recognition was: (1) A lever for, and result of, student participation in schooling and community; (2) a constitutive feature of the activity not just of the final product; (3) a critical component of school autonomy and a catalyst for institutional agency; and (4) contributed to, and was a result of, teacher professionalism.

To start, *what* students, teachers, and the school-as-a-whole at King were recognized for is important. Compared to King, most schools are recognized for rising (or already high) test scores, college acceptance rates or sports-related accomplishments. Students gain recognition for grades, being on honor roll, high SAT scores, having perfect attendance, or scoring game-winning goals. These individual and school-wide accomplishments certainly have merit; however, they are substantially different from the process of recognition at King. At King, recognition emerged from: (1) Purposely having students perform their work in front of audiences; (2) students engaging in community-related projects; and (3) striving for professional-quality work. Throughout these processes, recognition was a feature of the activity, not simply a ‘post hoc’ result; in other words, recognition, in part, defined the projects that students worked on and therefore constituted student participation from the outset. The diagram below, originally presented in Chapter 5, can be re-imagined, now with empirical instances.

Figure 7

Theoretical Diagram Revisited



Because recognition and audience occurred across grain sizes and scales of time, both formed the substance of the cultural practice of assessment. For example, every-day classroom assessment practices, such as students sharing drafts of written work to receive feedback, are smaller instances of ‘performing student work’ and recognition. While adding to students’ own sense of being noticed in the moment, these assessment practices developed the ease with which students were able to share their work outside the classroom and the school. To illustrate a larger grain size, picture the recognition that emerges at a culminating event. Here recognition is additionally about identity-building for the institution: audience members, while witnessing students’ accomplishments, come to know the school-as-a-whole differently.

At King, opportunities for recognition happened in structured, yet ultimately unpredictable, ways; established school-wide features set the stage for the *possibility* of recognition. For example, potential for recognition was ‘baked in’ to orchestrated events such as expedition culminations; but, how recognition occurred for students—what students actually garnered from these events - was unpredictable. Or, said differently, the individual moments of recognition were varied and diverse, held meaning for students, but were indefinable at the outset. Recognition was also unpredictable across grain sizes: it would be impossible to script the community-as-a-whole’s assessment of students’ and the school’s work. Putting high-quality student work in front of an audience launches it into the unknown—audience members take it up and do with it what they want. Accordingly, the notion of ‘audience’ was a feature that shaped student work from the beginning.

That Small Acts of Courage was the ‘never ending expedition’ exemplifies this process. How would the interviewees react in the moment and over time? How would the books be received at the special collections library? What would the lasting impact be? Who would it matter to, in what ways, and how would people express their gratitude or show support? Though some of this fit well-worn patterns—such as elder community-members appreciating that children captured their stories—the actual developmental moments could not be scripted. More specifically, Michael ‘being watched’ by members of the audience - of being noticed, of knowing that his work mattered—was hugely important to him. Any one moment might have been significant, but because there was a progression of recognition moments throughout *and* after the expedition, Michaels’

recognition endured, coalesced over time, allowing Michael to grow into someone worthy of the recognition that was inherent in the activity.

Orchestrated events also brought recognition to the school-as-a-whole: audience members glimpsed the school at its best. The school purposefully opened its doors to the outside world, showcasing high-quality student work. The reputation of King grew with each event, as new people became ‘King junkies’ and old friends reinforced their support for the school. Teachers’ sense of accomplishment and community acknowledgement also expanded: although purposefully in the background, teachers were appreciated at, and through, these events. Their work was made public and was therefore up on stage, too.

The constant flow of visitors was another ongoing and important source of recognition; and, at the same time, these visitors’ interest stemmed from King’s reputation. Students considered it normal for strangers to glimpse their work-in-progress—this normalcy (for both students and teachers) speaks to a way of performing school that was infused with people from outside the school viewing work and these same people sharing their acclaim. Although not *every* moment of *every* day, students were continuously peered into as they performed school.

Recognition was also *reciprocal*. Reciprocity distinguishes the type and kind of recognition at King from a more common notion of recognition within schools. Here are two examples. First, both student and interviewee gained recognition through Michael’s work—it is not just that both people were recognized, but that each fueled the other. One did not merely cause the other, but instead their recognition was interdependent and was constituted by the other. Michael was personally acknowledged and thanked by his

interviewee (and others in the community) for his work; Gerald Talbot's contributions to the Civil Rights Movement were publicly acknowledged through Michael's (and other students') work. Second, reciprocity also occurred at the school-as-a-whole level and across organizations. As David mentioned, community organizations benefited 'spiritually' from having students perform roles in, alongside, and for their organizations. Part of the spiritual benefit was the organization being publicly acknowledged as working with students; King, in turn, was recognized as a school that worked in the community.

Recognition at King also was an active process, not simply passively acquired, and thus shaped the cultural practice of assessment across grain sizes and scales of time. As Magnifico (2010) suggests, "active audience collaboration and feedback (which stands in contrast to the more passive, evaluative feedback of grades and teacher comments)...[student work] feels consequential, motivating, and interesting" (pp. 179-180). The active, evaluative interaction between audience and students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole is substantially different from many other schools' cultural practice of assessment.

In the above examples, what students produced—both artifacts and performances—were shaped by the audience; hence, audience members were *authors* of student work and contributed to students' participation. When students create a performance with an audience in mind, audience members contribute to what students produce. For example, as students prepared for their keynote in Portland, Oregon, they imagined who would be in the audience and what they would want to hear about King, themselves and their expedition. As I discuss below, this negotiation across temporal and spatial boundaries is embedded in the process of doing work at King.

Highlighting King's agency in how, and when, the school was recognized is also important. That King actively sought opportunities for students to share their contributions created ample means for them, in turn, to be individually and collectively acknowledged. Historically, this was partly a survival mechanism; however, it quickly evolved into a self-sustaining process. Additionally, although part of King's reputation was derived from their rising test scores, doing well on the mandated tests did not drive the school's curricular approach. Instead, self-created measures of 'what counts as progress' were the engine.

Finally, students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole were recognized in a special way, in part, because of the type of work they produced and how that work was shared. Students created things of value for their community, and thus the term *social consequence* is appropriate; though the tangible outcome might be knowledge of water quality in a local river, detailed resources for the local immigrant community or a plan for replanting trees in local neighborhoods, that students were *in* the community, becoming members of the community, relating to and learning from community experts, providing resources for the community was critical. Thus, student work became a social/public/community 'good.' Students were recognized for their work and for their membership in the community, even when they were 'doing theater' and performing the role of professionals. Therefore, rather than inherently being valuable for the community, the projects themselves *created* value; they procured their own worth and thus 'contributed' new artifacts to the community's sense of what was valuable.



## Boundary Objects Revisited

The above analysis of recognition and audience is replete with examples of students performing and presenting their work across boundaries. As Akkerman and Baker (2011) suggest, when boundaries are considered sites of, rather than foreclosures to, learning, objects of student work at a school like King create opportunities for boundary crossings. By their curricular nature, learning expeditions create opportunities for “continuous joint work at the boundary” (p. 133), fueled by the intentional use of audience and the resulting recognition.

When students perform and publish their work in ways that create ‘tools with full social meaning,’ their work moves from the potentially mundane (and representative of the ‘waste basket economy’) into sites of negotiation and meaning across social worlds. Through King’s exemplification, I shared several kinds of boundary objects, including:

- Student work as tools/resources for future student work
- Student work as tools/resources for future teacher work (i.e., negotiation among teachers regarding what counts as progress, what are legitimate forms of assessment, and how best to convey process to an outside audience)
- Student work as translating meaning about academic achievement to the community
- Student work as fodder for negotiation with community experts
- Teacher work as tools/resources for student work

These examples showcase the range and depth of how students’ products and performances promote negotiation within and across social worlds.

Additionally, because final products and performances are collaborative, with individual student work combined, by design, into collective work—the work among students, and between students and teachers, become sites of negotiation. Here superficial and individualistic notions of cooperative student groups instead become rich sites of

what Tharp (2005) calls ‘joint productive activity.’ As Tharp defines, joint productive activity occurs when,

...the shared motivations of participants around the objective of the activity sustains their propinquity, their mutual assistance, and their conversation - which in turn, through semiotic processes, establishes common understandings. Likewise, people's actions, attitudes, goals, and understanding *create the meaning of their activity*. In other words, the context of an activity influences the psychological meaning of that activity, and simultaneously, the actions of the participants. (p. 6, my emphasis)

This kind of activity is rare in schools; however, at schools like King, where collaboration partly defines the cultural practices, joint productive activity becomes an every-day possibility. This signals a fairly radical shift, one that dismantles commonly held notions of teaching and learning. In this model, teachers and students working alongside each other constitutes learning – though each may have different motives and objectives, they are still working together on meaningful tasks of which recognition is an inherent component.

The following table summarizes *how* students-performing-their-work acts as boundary objects and *how* student work became boundary objects, negotiating meaning and distributing knowledge across time. Also, present within each processes, are the inherent, discursive and documentary means of assessment that Jordan and Putz (2004) lay out.

Table 6

Table Summarizing a Range of Boundary-Object Processes

Artifact/process	Dilemma/Negotiation	What's produced
<i>Using exemplars</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provokes student thinking – how to produce professional-quality work?</li> <li>Generates teacher-team discussions – what are the learning outcomes and how to help students get there?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New artifacts</li> <li>Implementation plan</li> </ul>
<i>Sharing drafts with peers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does good writing look like?</li> <li>How to make improvements?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better drafts - final products</li> </ul>
<i>Preparing for a culminating event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What and how to share with an audience?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance</li> </ul>
<i>Publishing a volume of student work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does it mean to perform school?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships between students/teachers and community members and community institutions</li> <li>Future historical work</li> </ul>
<i>Presenting artifacts of student work to teacher audiences (i.e., EL school designer as 'national pollinator')</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does it mean to do high quality work and what counts as evidence?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New teacher understandings/new teacher practices</li> </ul>
<i>On-going development of the Six Step Planning/Debriefing guide</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What does it mean to do high quality work and what counts as evidence?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New teacher understandings/new teacher practices</li> </ul>

In learning expeditions, both the process of producing the artifact and the finished artifact itself facilitates boundary crossings. Thus, student work is a boundary object multiple times as it is recontextualized. The first is the development of the product/performance alongside each other and community members; then, once the artifact exists, it becomes a boundary object in another sense, existing beyond the end of

the project. Hence, the ‘Frankenstein-like qualities’ I referred to earlier. A clear example of this was seen in the Small Acts of Courage expedition: producing the narratives while working with community members was a site of negotiation; the finished books then became an ongoing site of negotiation.

Here is why boundary objects are so important to the cultural practice of assessment at King: students’ products and performances are negotiated between the related worlds of school and community – the boundaries between the two, though always there, begin to shift and change. This helps sustain a mutually beneficial relationship, instead of one filled with either neglect or antagonism.

### Shaping an Institution Through the Cultural Practice of Assessment

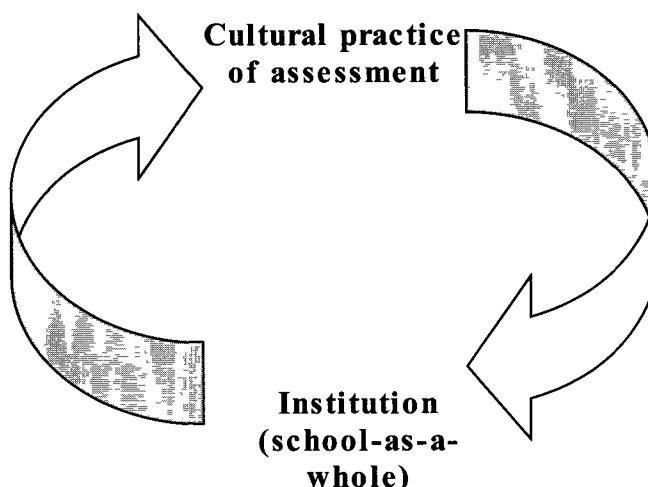
Lemke (2000), asks, “How do *moments* add up to *lives*? How do our shared moments together add up to *social life* as such” (p. 273, italics in the original)? I have considered similar questions throughout my analysis, focusing on the following: How do individual moments of student participation add up to academic achievement? How do shared moments of recognition add up to cultural practices within a school? My analysis across timescales and grain sizes is a way to envision these pathways and see how they relate to each other *dialectically*: instead of an either-or dichotomy, we can understand them as constituting each other.

Assessment, when not simply thought of as specific classroom strategies (i.e., quizzes and tests, peer critique of work), but also as the evaluation inherent in communities viewing and using what students produce and perform, the cultural practice of assessment comes into view. There are identifiable consequences, including teachers ‘becoming professionals’ and students engaging in academic work. These then, in turn,

continually shape the institution. This dialectical process is shown in the simple figure below.

Figure 8

The dialectical relationship between the cultural practice of assessment and an institution



Part of understanding the cultural practice of assessment is recognizing the ways in which schools like King can intentionally perforate the typical boundaries of school in service of sustaining reform, of sticking with a vision of heterogeneous grouping, of living up to the ideal of engaging all students in rigorous academic learning. Unlike many schools' cultural practice of assessment where learning is "hermetically sealed within the self-confirming culture of the school" (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989, p. 34), schools like King engage in practices that bridge school and community and foster productive relationships across social worlds. This is dramatically different than adopting and perpetuating practices that stymie connections or foster antagonistic relationships between schools and communities. What Caitlin called the 'golden nugget,' connections with and in the community are in service of academic engagement and are also a meaningful by-product of academic investigations.

## Summary

In this section I made connections across the six overarching theoretical themes, emphasizing the function of recognition and boundary objects in a school's cultural practice of assessment. In my final chapter, I turn to the significance of my findings, specifically focusing on implications in three areas: 1) Theoretical; 2) methodological; and 3) practical implications. I return to my opening argument, contrasting the implications of two dramatically different cultural practices of assessment: the current testing and accountability framework and localized evidence of meaningful academic engagement.

### SECTION THREE

#### CHAPTER 10

#### PERFORMING SCHOOL IN A WAY THAT MATTERS

*After six years of traditional schooling, an 11 year old enters the world of her new school. At first this new setting is foreign. Gone are the days of filling out worksheets, quietly allowing more vocal students to raise their hands to answer teachers' questions, and going through her day feeling like she is in competition with her peers for grades and praise. Instead, this child works on interesting tasks, learns to communicate with peers, and produces work of a quality that she did not think she was capable.*

*Students at her new school treat each other kindly – differences such as cultural background, country of origin, gender identity and socio-economic status are acknowledged and addressed, but do not obscure her relationships with other children or her teachers.*

*Each year, she works on projects that build on previous students' work, breaking down the traditional boundaries of the academic year – this is one of the ways that she knows her work matters – it extends into, and contributes to, the next groups' process and progress. Also, what she produces has real value – her work is not simply destined for files or the front of her parents' refrigerator, but instead contributes to solving community issues. Multiple stakeholders pay attention to, and use, her and her classmate's work.*

*Her work is assessed – she and her teachers understand where 'she is at' in the curriculum. Assessment is more about progress toward a tangible goal rather than doing well on a test or receiving a grade. Though rarely used, tests have diagnostic purposes – giving teachers, families and students direct and timely feedback about how to alter the ebb and flow of curriculum to meet the needs of this group of students.*

*Community members acknowledge, and are part of, the progress of her school. Rather than admonishing (or praising) the school for raising (or not) aggregated test scores, this student, each day, sees people from the community in her school, working alongside students and teachers. (continued on next page)*

*At her school, all students have the same opportunity to learn, whether they recently arrived in the U.S. and speak only a few words of English, have few economic resources, or come from a privileged family, each student benefits from the affordances provided to them. And, finally, all students are recognized for, and develop through, their accomplishments, helping them to be, and be seen, as important members of the school and local community.*

The brief opening story is a utopian, though realistic, vision of schooling, as seen through the eyes of a child unaccustomed to performing school in a way that matters.

Although King does not represent all of these imaginings, the school does many of these things on most days. In this final chapter, I share implications, at multiple levels, of the stories worth telling about King Middle School. I explore the following questions:

What's at stake for students as tensions between innovations and standards are negotiated?

What do students, teachers and schools have to gain and what do they have to lose?

Here I share the significance of my research findings, aimed at conceptual, methodological and practical implications. In particular, I focus my practical implications at recommendations for policy, schools and classrooms. My purpose is to highlight the ways in which current 'testing and accountability' practices impoverish teaching and learning, while arguing for policies, schools and classrooms that foster cultural practices that allow for 'performing school that matters.' I also share limitations of my research and future research directions that emerged from my analysis.

I use the phrase 'performing school that matters,' addressing the implications of multiple meanings of 'performance,' and to explore different ways of understanding school that 'matters.' More specifically, *performing* refers to: (1) Literal instances of performance, where students take the stage in front of audiences; (2) 'doing theater' with



students, where students play the role of professionals; and (3) participating in the every day occurrences of school—as in ‘performing the role of a student at King.’ *Matters* refers to: (1) Students and teachers making tangible contributions to their local community; (2) students caring about their work; (3) student work as consequential to other people; and (4) people inside and outside the school taking notice of student work. In some ways, performing school that matters is about ‘boundary objects by design.’ By this I mean, schools and curricula that are intentionally designed with the capacity for students and teachers to perform boundary crossings and develop ‘at the boundaries.’

### Conceptual and Methodological Implications

#### Recognition as Assessment/Assessment as Recognition

As shown throughout my study of King Middle School, particular cultural practices of assessment compel individuals, grade levels and schools to be acknowledged for their accomplishments. Things of value—the artifacts—that are produced, when shared publicly, initiate recognition; however, the projects themselves assure that recognition. Thus, recognition and assessment are entwined and constitute the activity itself.

Miettinen (2005) discusses the “artifact-mediated desire for recognition” (p. 53), describing how recognition is “a source of professional self-identity” (p. 65) enacted within social domains. It is not just that recognition is something that is produced and procured; recognition is something that is desired by people through the community-based activities that they engage in and produce. Being recognized is a sign of belonging to a community and as being a viable member of that community.

Throughout my research, I have shown students and teachers being recognized for their accomplishments. Shifting this slightly to a *desire* for recognition is integral to the

process of performing school that matters, across multiple grain sizes and scales of time, because it alters the notion of motivation to residing within the activity, instead of something contained within individuals. In the stories I tell about King, recognition is a feature of the activity *and* something that is a result of the activity. For example, the *possibility* of developmental recognition existed in the activity of Small Acts of Courage long before students actually began their interviews.

More specifically, recognition was integral to the cultural practice of assessment at King. It was not just something that was produced *through* assessment practices, but instead was constitutive *of* those practices. My research, therefore, points toward a conceptual understanding of assessment that includes recognition *and* a conception of recognition that includes assessment. Here assessment without a certain kind of recognition tends toward an impoverished notion of learning—one that disassociates students from their work. Recognition without a certain kind of assessment is equally narrowed. For example, when students receive a grade as a form of assessment, the grade is an abstraction—a stand in—for the purported learning.

Additionally, when recognition is an integral part of the activity, there is a stronger possibility of joint productive activity. In other words, in a project that entails collaboration toward a negotiated end, recognition is about being acknowledged for making community-based contributions.

As I have said, recognition is also *developmental*. Miettinen uses Holzkamp-Osterkamp's (1981) concept of "action potency" (p. 55) to describe what makes "the development of the individual possible" (p. 55). Recognition here is considered the "the objectified demonstration of the capabilities of the individual to contribute to the vitality

of the community” (p. 63); therefore recognition provides action potency for individual development within a social domain.

Recognition is also a feature inherent in boundary objects. When student work becomes ‘tools with full social meaning,’ what students produce and the process that produces it, creates opportunities for recognition and designation of value for students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole. As mentioned in Chapter 9, learning expeditions at King – and the supporting school-wide practices – actually craft the worth of student work. Miettinen says, “Our desire for objects and artifacts is often impelled by the value others attach to them, and so our desire for the objects is a desire for the desire of the other” (p. 63). Boundary objects facilitate this process.

By adopting a conception of assessment that takes into account the above definition of recognition, the possibility of creating particular developmental pathways for students becomes an everyday reality. Assessment becomes a cultural practice through which individuals are acknowledged for, and develop through, their contributions.

#### Examining Assessment across Levels

It is impossible to analyze ‘situations’ from every angle – accurately capturing and examining a social world from *every* grain size and across *all* scales of time is not realistic. However, to not attempt to strategically examine situations across analytical entry points creates an uneven study of chosen research phenomena. In my own work, possible grain sizes ranged from the history of school reform to students’ classroom interactions. Each of these grain sizes, in turn, could be analyzed at multiple scales of time: from a seconds-long speech turn to the decades-long process of school change. My own strategy was to tack back and forth, rather than always attending to each possibility.

Instead of doing one, and then the other, I established a systematic way of moving between, and within, levels.

As previously suggested, school-wide cultural practices of assessment shape the classroom and individual level and vice versa. Accordingly, my findings suggest that the cultural practice of assessment at any school simultaneously shapes that institution, and vice versa—and that the characteristics of a school’s cultural practice of assessment is critical to understanding students’ opportunity to learn. While this might sound obvious, this is not how schools are always understood or examined. The problem is how assessment is typically conceived, even when it is understood at multiple levels. I argue for first seeing assessment as a cultural practice, which is a shift away from individualistic conceptions, and second, to expand and apply this conception across grain sizes and timescales.

Many researchers, from multiple perspectives, similarly make calls for analysis across levels. For example, multi-level modeling allows for the quantitative examination of ‘nested’ data. In the last decade quantitative researchers have increasingly made arguments for studying student-level data in the context of classrooms, schools, districts and states, and across multiple moments in time (e.g., Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Schreiber & Griffin, 2004). These analyses attempt to account for the effects of variables such as cohorts, growth over time and school-wide circumstances.

There are differences, however, between the above and attempts to study situational phenomenon at *multiple* levels, simultaneously, from different entry points. In particular, analyzing impacts of assessment practices at various grain sizes necessitates a sociocultural approach. A recent example highlights my concerns. To secure Race to the

Top funding, the state of Tennessee implemented a system of evaluating teachers based on students' standardized test scores (Winerip, 2011). This created multiple dilemmas. At the elementary level, at one school in particular, because testing is not mandated until third grade and several subject areas—such as Physical Education—are not tested, many teachers' evaluations could not even in part be based on test scores. Several 'solutions' were put in place: teachers with untested subject areas could pick another teachers' scores to use as 15% of their own evaluation; the principal was required to do lengthy observations of non-tested teachers, which led to hours of paper work for each teacher's evaluation. How best to understand what is happening at Tennessee schools? Without analytically taking into account the history of the situation, the impact on individual teachers as well as the school-as-a-whole, an incomplete understanding of this school's changing assessment practices of both students and teachers would be gleaned.

### Practical Implications

In this section I discuss the practical implications of my analysis. I share the significance of my findings and make specific recommendations at three levels: classroom, school, and policy. My recommendations focus on setting up academic institutions so that school can be performed in a way that matters. This is counter to the prevailing regime of testing and accountability that promotes what Sidorkin calls the wastebasket economy, in which students' labor is exchanged for grades. There are consequences for what Lave and McDermott (2002) call 'estranged learning.' By alienating students from meaningful engagement in academics and communities, students are reduced to completing tasks that have little worth. The disproportionate number of urban, poor and students of color who drop out of high school seems to testify to the

consequences of a system that rewards certain types of knowledge accumulation while forcing others out of the system. It is not just about engaging students in the moment, it is also creating opportunities for rich academic investigations that resonate with the everyday lives of all children.

## Policy

### *1. Allow schools to sustain reform over multiple years*

In a way, King's story of sustained reform—of using the 'developmental approach' to continually refine and define *their* brand of school change—could be read as a tragedy. First, King's success comes after years of concerted effort. King's is not a story of quick turn around (i.e., dramatic change over a short period of time). A major lesson gleaned is that change takes time, is constant, and is hard work. Having a talented, mission-driven principal who is able to sustain reform for 23 years helps, but is only one piece of the puzzle. It is a tragedy that few will want to hear this message; shouting from the hill tops "stick with reform for at least 5-10 years and then you'll see remarkable results" is not popular in the current accountability climate. But, nonetheless, this is the message. A specific NCLB mandate that truncates the possibility of reform is the designation of schools as 'School In Needs of Improvement' when they do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress guidelines. These schools do have options for improvement, including adopting school-wide reform and reconstitution (Ravitch, 2010). These options, though seemingly reform-minded, necessitate top-down approaches and give the illusion of quick-fix prescribed reforms.

## *2. Allow multiple types of evidence to ‘count’ as measures of academic achievement.*

A major constraint to enacting innovative reforms are federal policies that focus on standardized tests as *the* measure of academic achievement, school quality and, increasingly, teacher effectiveness. It is not just that these tests only measure a certain narrowed subset of skills and knowledge; their prominence deprives and obscures alternative forms of students’ accomplishments as well as features of school life that might otherwise contribute to achievement. Although schools like King develop localized support for alternative markers of success, until federal, state and district level accountability measures include visible, tangible performances by students, the opportunity for developmental recognition and esteem is stymied.

### Schools

#### *1. Develop agency*

The phrase “you can’t control the wind, but you can control the sails” aptly describes King’s agency. Although the school-as-a-whole could not change the direction of federal, state and district mandates, King vigorously kept its hands on the metaphoric tiller and the ropes that controlled the sails. By using the wind to its advantage, King manifested its own destiny, constantly working within prevailing winds to sustain a vision of a de-tracked school and to engage heterogeneous groups of students in extended, interdisciplinary investigations. King purposefully steered the process rather than being a victim of restrictive policies. Without a doubt, the *kind* of school reform strongly aided King in having and using agency: that students created professional-quality products and performances, and shared them publicly, was a powerful tool in garnering support, making way for the school to exercise its agency.

Schools appear to be at the mercy of restrictive policies. Some look to charters or other alternative structures to gain autonomy. A lesson learned from King is that schools can work ingeniously *within* the system, leveraging the perceived positive qualities in return for unprecedented recognition and freedom.

## *2. Intentionally perforate the traditional boundaries of school*

The following quote from Eckert (1989), though said about high schools, applies to most schools:

The boundaries of the high school...originate with the school's basic mission to serve a given geographic area, and are reinforced through competition with other high schools. This competition encourages school loyalty and the development of school identity...identification with outside groups threatens the integrity of the school community, which is necessary for the maintenance of a strong hierarchical organization...

The cultural practice of assessment at King was substantially different than what traditionally occurs in public schools. Instead of seeing relationships with the community as threatening the school's integrity, King used this to build their internal and external reputation. The purpose of perforating the typical boundaries of school, especially in the current era of standards and accountability, allows a school to gain community support while simultaneously expanding students' opportunity to learn. If King did one without the other, their work would not be profound. That King accomplished both—while sustaining each other—is all the more remarkable.

Here boundary objects enable the performance of school that matters by encouraging learning within and at the edges of social worlds. Boundary objects engage key players from within and outside of schools in the everyday dilemmas of schooling. Accordingly, there are reciprocal benefits, not simply a one-way focus on student learning.



### *3. Create a collaborative and caring staff culture*

In the 1990s, Evans (1996) championed the ‘human side of school change’ as critical to the success of any educational reform: school reform had to engage teachers in implementing a vision that they cared about and could actually do together. Similarly, part of what sustained school reform at King was a culture of assessment that pushed teachers out of their ‘egg carton’ classrooms and into the collaborative design and implementation of curriculum. Teachers cared about the institution—the school-as-a-whole - more than just their classroom. Their reform efforts put people—teachers in particular—at the center. Teacher professionalism at King, in part, was fueled by showcasing *teacher* work, through the public performance of what students produced. To adequately institutionalize reforms, teachers have to be central to the process and they need to be given opportunities to develop collaboratively.

#### Classroom

Although this section is called ‘classroom,’ I do not simply offer suggestions for specific practices; instead I share implications for *school-wide* practices—curricular features that are enacted on behalf of students and teachers – at the classroom level.

#### *1. Create opportunities for students to engage in reciprocal caring*

Consider Michael’s case: through academic work, Michael cared for the contributions he made to historical knowledge *and* for the person at the center of his inquiry. In turn, Michael experienced being cared about by the subject of his caring (i.e., his interviewee). Imagine if curriculum was designed with this in mind. Projects, in which students interviewed veterans, recent immigrants, community elders, local scientists, etc., would just be the tip of iceberg. Other opportunities for reciprocal caring

include investigating the condition of local landscapes and taking action to improve it: seeing the tangible result of a local environment transformed through community-based clean-ups or school-wide reductions in energy can stimulate a students' participation in academic tasks.

Though ostensibly about boundary objects, the following quote, nicely summarizes the benefit of having opportunities for reciprocal caring: boundary objects “creates a possibility to look at oneself through the eyes of other worlds” (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011, p. 146). It is not difficult to imagine the reciprocal relationship between Gerald Talbot and Michael being described in this way, where both develop via the impressions and expressions of the other.

## *2. Showcase student work in front of multiple stakeholders*

Having one's work presented before an audience transforms one's engagement in the process and product of learning. When that audience includes multiple stakeholders, students also gain from seeing their work as worthy of discussion and debate. Students see tangible evidence that their work matters; that their work can make a difference. In this sense, being recognized fuels participation and, in turn, participation in certain kinds of projects fosters recognition when audiences are considered 'authors' of student work.

## *3. Engage students in projects that matter to them*

Although closely aligned with reciprocal caring and audience, it is also critical to create opportunities for students to labor over investigations that matter to them. Fitting with Dewey's (1897) belief that “education...is a process of living and not a preparation for future living,” it is important to design projects where the results are close and local to students' lives. Though localizing all subject matter is challenging (consider teaching

ancient Greece locally), using state standards as a starting point for immersing students in local dilemmas is often possible. For example, in studying the Civil Rights Movement, one could also study current and local civil rights concerns.

*4. See assessment as an integral to, rather than separate from, learning*

A critical feature of the cultural practice of assessment at King, is that assessment is infused within the process of learning. Although sometimes summative, much evaluation happens within the activity itself—or, said differently, assessment is itself learning. What Roth (1998) terms ecologically valid assessment, assessment is part of, rather than separate from, learning. Standardized tests are at the low range of ecological validity because they are disconnected from learning events and reduce demonstration of skills and knowledge to multiple-choice answers. Students performing their work is at the other end of the spectrum, because in performance students ‘stand a head taller’ as they showcase their results—they continue to develop *through* the process.

*5. Allow students and teachers to engage in projects together*

When students and teachers investigate questions that interest them both and that do not have pre-determined answers at the outset, both parties’ participation becomes instrumental to learning. Here the well-worn phrase ‘guide on the side instead of sage on the stage’ is only the start of transforming the teacher-student relationship. Although each is invested in her own way, with different ‘skin in the game,’ each has something to gain through her own legitimate contribution. This is substantially different from the more typical relationship, where teachers are the sole audience and judge of student work. The cultural practice of assessment at schools like King entails and necessitates shared endeavors.

### Limitations and Future Research Directions

Throughout my research I purposefully chose what to attend to, acknowledging that the directions I look advanced some lines of analysis while diminishing others. In this section, I present limitations of my research, while proposing future studies that, in part, can address possible shortcomings.

First, my data collection did not directly focus on the local experts or members of specific audiences. Although I myself was an audience member of students' products and performances – and my analysis drew on my observations of these events—I did not interview experts who worked directly with students or audience members who viewed student work. Following an expert who worked with students over time would be a way to explore a dialectical notion of recognition. For example, one could simultaneously track the progression of Gerald Talbot's experience in *Small Acts of Courage*, along with the students who interviewed him. This would be especially interesting since he is now participating in a new round of interviews with a second group of King students. Also, understanding more specifically the role of audience, from actual audience members perspectives—across a range of people—would help to flesh out the idea of 'audience as authors of student work.'

Second, although I did study what students produced in *Small Acts of Courage*, a more fine-grained examination of artifacts of student work, as they progressed over time, would yield additional insights into the production of 'things of value' and sites of negotiation among people from different social worlds (i.e., boundary objects). For example, tracing Michael's writing of Gerald Talbot's story, through his eight or ten drafts, would allow for an exploration of the decisions he made regarding what was

important to include—and what constrained these choices. This would potentially allow for an artifact-based understanding of the development of recognition as a feature of the activity, not just something that emerges at the end.

Third, technology played an important role throughout students' creation and presentation of products and performances. For example, King's website was a critical means for showcasing student work and of telling King's story to outside audiences. Although technology features lightly in my analysis, taking up technological resources in itself as an object of analysis would provide a 'way in' to explore how different forms of technology enable and constrain student work, how audiences view artifacts of student work, and the ways that technology facilitates boundary crossings. A specific line of research here would be examining Expeditionary Learning's recent web-based launch of the Student Project Archive. This archive allows networked teachers to search for, view, and download examples of high-quality student work and to read descriptions of the project that generated these artifacts. Understanding the role of technology in teachers' understanding and implementation of Expeditionary Learning practices would further work into the mechanisms that enable student work as boundary objects.

Fourth, a more in-depth analysis of historical processes and related documents would provide another layer of understanding into the trajectory of reform at King over time. Although I examined the progression of King's school-change efforts, there are boxes and boxes of files at King that I only teased at the edges of exploring. By looking at documents that were produced (and kept) at different stages of reform would yield an additional analytical entry point into the history of King's efforts.

The above limitations, when combined with my overall findings, point toward specific directions for continued research:

1. *Theory refining* – Applying and testing my theory in new settings would create means for explicating the theory that emerged from my research. Potential contexts include:  
(a) Schools that appear similar to King in their ‘making student work public’ but have different historical progressions; (b) schools that are beginning the process of implementing school-wide reform based on Expeditionary Learning - examining the process as it unfolds would allow for re-tooling of my theory; and (c) schools that have a radically different cultural practice of assessment, where test scores and accountability drive curriculum on a daily basis.
2. *Design-based research* – In this chapter I advocate for ‘boundary objects by design’ and joint productive activity in schools. What this actually looks like, and the implications of doing so, is another potential site for future research. Starting curriculum design, as well as school reform efforts, with the idea of boundary objects and joint productive activity and studying the progression over time would create opportunities for further testing of my theory and research-school partnerships.
3. *Focused study of recognition* – More work is needed to flesh out a sociocultural understanding of recognition in the context of schooling. Although my study has covered much ground, using recognition as a *starting point* would allow for a more refined understanding of recognition and how it functions for students, teachers and the school-as-a-whole.

### Final Thoughts: ‘And Those Moments I Haven’t Forgot’

‘And those moments I haven’t forgot’ is a quote from Michael that captures his beliefs about Small Acts of Courage. For a young man—a 7<sup>th</sup> grader who struggled with school—to have unforgettable academic moments is profound. For middle schoolers, these in-school moments more often come from extracurricular activities, if they come at all; but, to be *known* by fellow students, their teachers, *and* by respected people in the community represents the ‘golden nugget’ that Caitlin spoke of. In the long run, academic achievement matters. However, when academic content is purposefully infused with social relationships and community practices, learning matters to students in substantially different ways than what more commonly occurs in a standards-based system.

These moments of recognition are critical to the growth and development of all students. However, in public schooling in the United States, where large groups of mostly minority and low-income children do not have the same opportunity to learn as their more privileged counterparts, these moments are especially important. Performing school that matters provides a way forward to do more than simply close the achievement gap. It reframes the debate about what achievement looks like and how to create opportunities for young people to grow and develop in all aspects of their lives, including academically.

I end with a quote from Dewey (1986, p. 140), in which he shares his own vision of utopian schooling:

This attitude which resulted in a sense of positive power involved, of course, elimination of fear, embarrassment, of constraint, of self-consciousness; eliminated the conditions which created the feeling of failure and incapacity. Possibly it included the development of a confidence, or readiness to tackle difficulties, of actual eagerness to seek problems instead of dreading them and running away from them. It included a rather ardent faith in human capacity. It

included a faith in the capacity of the environment to support worthwhile activities, provided the environment was approached and dealt with in the right way.

Dewey argued for schools that engaged students in ‘worthwhile activities’ and that had a ‘rather ardent faith in human capacity.’ I believe that King Middle School, and others like it, exemplifies both of these. One without the other would not be enough; but, together, they amplify the potential for all students to be, and become, vibrant and productive members of the communities in which they live—now and into the future.



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## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

### University of New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research  
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585  
Fax: 603-862-3564

09-Sep-2010

Middleton, Michael J  
Education, Morrill Hall  
Durham, NH 03824

**IRB #:** 4730

**Study:** The role of assessment practices in middle school students' engagement during a learning expedition

**Approval Expiration Date:** 07-Dec-2010

**Modification Approval Date:** 03-Sep-2010

**Modification:** Changes per 8/17/10 memo

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your modification to this study, as indicated above. Further changes in your study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation.

**Approval for this protocol expires on the date indicated above.** At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects in this study. If your study is still active, you may request an extension of IRB approval.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. This document is available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html> or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or [Julie.simpson@unh.edu](mailto:Julie.simpson@unh.edu). Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

  
Julie F. Simpson  
Manager

cc: File  
Seaman, Jayson  
Rheingold, Alison

## APPENDIX B: MEMO INFORMING STAFF ABOUT MY RESEARCH

**TO:** King Middle School Staff  
**FROM:** Alison Rheingold  
**DATE:** September 15, 2010

My name is Alison Rheingold and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New Hampshire in the Department of Education. I am writing to introduce myself, though I know many of you from my research last spring with Caitlin LeClair and the Small Acts of Courage expedition. This fall I will be doing additional research at King exploring how student work, in the form of culminating products and performances, is supported and shaped at the school level. I also will look at the different ways that working toward final products and performances shapes student engagement, contributes to academic outcomes and fosters community connections. I am starting off working alongside David Grant a few days a week – you will see me tagging along with David and assisting with Media Crews. I will also be conducting interviews with a cross section of staff at the King throughout the fall.

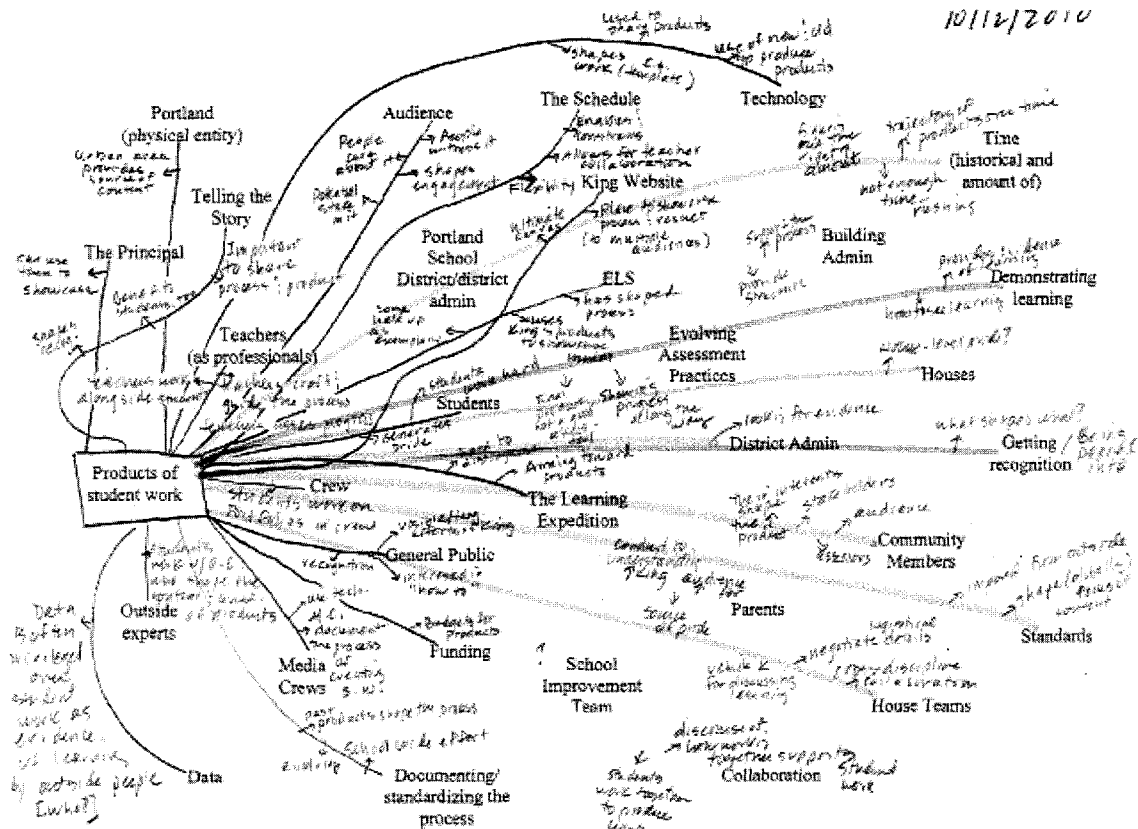
If you have questions or thoughts please contact me. I look forward to meeting you!

**Cell phone:** (978) 888-4901  
**Email:** [alisonrheingold@gmail.com](mailto:alisonrheingold@gmail.com)

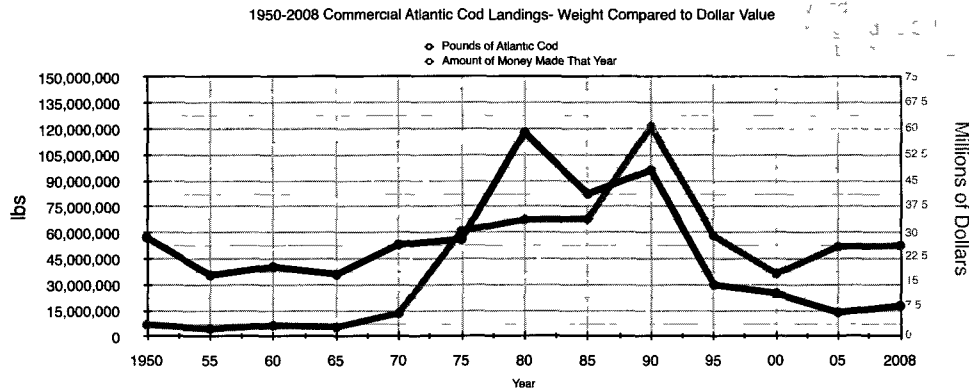
Alison Rheingold

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10/12/2010

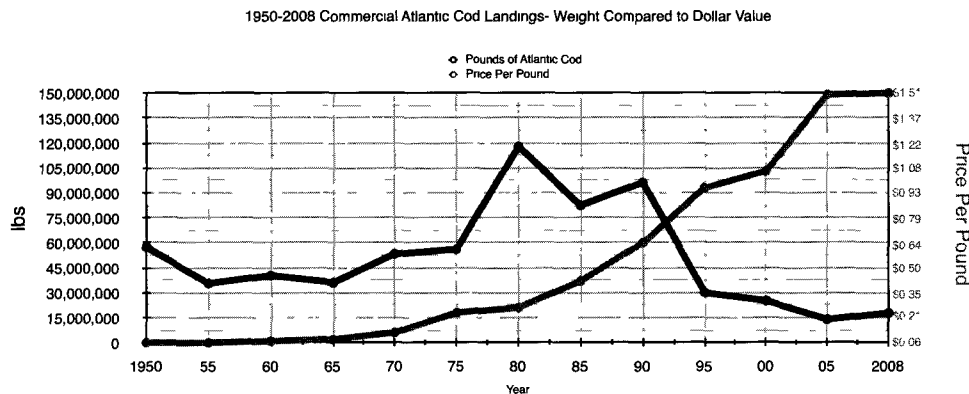


## APPENDIX D: BACKGROUND FOR POSTER ABOUT HARMS OF OVERFISHING



(Figure 1) The graph illustrates the supply and demand relationship affecting price of Atlantic Cod as fish stocks fall from overfishing.

Graph #1 shows two items of data plotted for selected years beginning in 1950 and at 5 year intervals until 2008 (last year with available data). The purple points show pounds of cod landed, the blue points show the dollar (\$) value of the fish. The line graph was chosen to indicate the trend of the data over time. The years are plotted along the x-axis. The labels on the y-axis at the left of the graph show the range of values of pounds of cod caught by commercial fishermen in the U.S. The labels on the right of the graph are y-axis range figures for the dollar value of the cod. The trend of the purple line shows that catches grow larger as boats and equipment improve, but fall sharply as the fish population decreases from overfishing. The \$ value increases rapidly in the early 1970s and from the mid-1980s on as demand grows. I want to show two trends from 1950 (1) the increase in catch sizes as fishing pressure intensified until overfishing depletes stocks in the late 1980s (2) the increase in dollar value occurs after the supply declines but the demand remains the same or increases.



(Figure 2) The graph more clearly illustrates the supply and demand relationship affecting price increase of Atlantic Cod as fish stocks fall from overfishing.

Graph #2 shows two line graphs for the same years as Graph #1. The purple line is identical to the purple line in graph #1, pounds of cod landed in the U.S. The blue line in this graph shows price per pound calculated from the data used in Graph #1. Once again I chose line graphs to show trends over time. The x-axis is labeled with the data entry years. The y-axis labels on the left are for the purple points indicating pounds of cod landed. The labels on the right are y-axis labels showing dollar value per pound. Since the data are associated and derived from the Graph #1 data, I tried to show more easily and dramatically than in #1 that money increases with the increased demand that must go with decrease in supply due to overfishing.

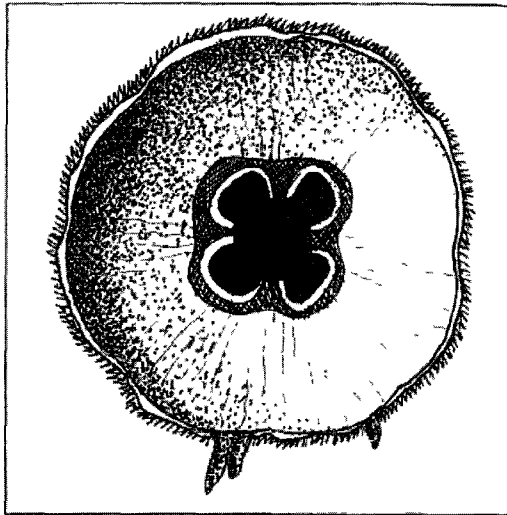
### Sources

NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology 10 Dec 2009 <[http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual\\_landings.html](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/st1/commercial/landings/annual_landings.html)>

## APPENDIX E: STUDENT WORK FROM THE INTO THE ZONE FIELD GUIDE

### Moon Jelly

*Aurelia aurita*



**General Description:** Moon jellies have four white, L-shaped bodies that are visible through a milk white jelly bell. Its color ranges from tan to orange pink.

**Habitat:** Its habitat is in the intertidal zones in summer. They can be stranded in low tide pools by strong winds and ebb tides. Moon jellies may move and swim in mid to top water where humans usually are. They probably live close to the top water

because that's where their foods live and because at the bottom of the ocean, there are corals reefs and other hard animals and plants. A jellyfish needs softness and space.

**Geographic Range:** Moon Jellies appear in spring and summer in Cape Cod bays. By July they can appear in Maine. They also live in tropical waters around the world.

**How it Protects itself:** Its protection is its stinging tentacles which give a rash if handled. The predator who eats it may die. The sting is deadly, more deadly than a snake bite to some smaller organisms.

**Uses:** Unknown.

**Observations:** When Moon Jellies die they evaporate into water because they are 96% water.

**Reproduction:** The mature jellies produce eggs and sperm cells by late July or August. In autumn, eggs hatch into larvae that attach to lower level rocks in crevices and tide pools on sheltered shores. Miniature moon jellies released early in spring reach sexual maturity in six months to two years.

**Food Chain:** They eat plankton and small crustaceans. Animals that eat moon jellies include bigger fish.

**Life Span:** Their deaths are caused by October storms. The moon jellies can travel 50 miles or more before they die.

## APPENDIX F: POSSIBLE PRODUCT FORMATS FROM EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

----- Formats -----	Calendar Diagram Instructional manual Interpretive signs Map Poster: Informational Timeline Publications Article Brochure Interview(s) Journal Journal: Fictional Magazine Magazine: Science Magazine: Literary Magazine: Historical Newspaper Review Report Report: Science Report: Social studies
<b>3D &amp; Media</b> -----	<b>Visual &amp; Narrative Arts</b> -----
Model: General Model: Scientific Model: Historical/Cultural Model: Architectural Video: General Video: Documentary Video: PSA Video: Short fictional movie Video: Project documentation Website	Autobiography Biography Biography: Fictional Bookmark Character file Character file: Historical Fiction Fiction: Historical Flier Photography Poetry Postcard Poster: General Short Story Stamp: Postage Trading card Visual arts
<b>Books &amp; Guides</b> -----	
Book: Fiction Book: Nonfiction/Informational Children's book Children's book: Alphabet Children's book: Coloring Comic book/graphic novel Cookbook Exhibit guide Field guide: Natural science Field guide: Cultural/historical Museum guide Note cards	
<b>Dramatic Arts</b> -----	
Performance: General Performance: Play Performance: Music Performance: Dance/movement Play script Program: General Program: Playbill	
<b>Information Design</b> -----	
Blueprint	

## APPENDIX G: 6-STEP GUIDE TO PLANNING AND DEBRIEFING EXPEDITIONS

### Six Steps Debrief Rubric

Expedition Title:		House:	Date:
1 = Undeveloped	2 = Developing	3 = Well Developed	
<b>1. Develop a <u>compelling topic</u>:</b>			Score 1 2 3
that <u>targets the content and skills</u> that students need to know at their grade levels,			
that is <u>engaging to students</u> and often addresses <u>community issues</u> ,			
that provides opportunities for <u>in-depth investigations</u> by all students,			
that provides opportunities for students to identify with or consider <u>multiple perspectives</u> (on gender, race, ethnicity, social class, or controversial scientific issues),			
that has <u>guiding questions</u> that synthesize the big ideas and require students to engage in <u>complex thinking</u>			
<u>Comments</u>			

<b>2. Design a <u>comprehensive final product</u>:</b>	Score 1 2 3
that requires each student to create representations of the <u>targeted knowledge and skills</u> ,	
that addresses the <u>guiding questions</u> ,	
that includes <u>accommodations for differentiation</u>	
that has an <u>exemplar model</u> and <u>product descriptors</u> created by the house or by other houses that can evolve during the expedition,	
that is adapted from a current <u>professional product</u> ,	

that includes <u>high quality writing</u> and <u>craftsmanship</u> from each student,	
that includes a plan for students to <u>archive their finished pieces and reflections digitally for portfolio</u>	
<u>Comments</u>	

<b>3. Choose the <u>professional role(s)</u> that students will assume during the expedition:</b>	Score 1 2 3
so that <u>professionals</u> can be scheduled to work with students,	
so that students can develop the skill set(s) associated with the <u>profession(s) and expedition</u> ,	
so that students can present their <u>final product</u> to the <u>appropriate audience</u>	
<u>Comments</u>	

<b>4. Identify and organize the <u>major learning resources</u> for the expedition:</b>	Score 1 2 3
that are <u>developmentally appropriate</u> for all learners,	
that provide opportunities for all students to pursue <u>independent research</u> .	
that are made available in an <u>on-line index</u> , in the classroom, and/or in the library	
<u>Comments</u>	



5. Get the expedition on a <u>shared team calendar</u> :	Score 1 2 3
to schedule <u>major learning activities</u> and due dates,	
to block out a number of days in the final weeks of the expedition for student and teacher <u>critiques and revisions</u>	
to schedule <u>school specialists</u> and <u>community experts</u> ,	
to share <u>school resources</u> ,	
to block out testing dates and other events,	
to book 2 - 3 <u>field experiences</u>	
to block out additional time for the <u>expedition manager</u>	
<u>Comments.</u>	

6. Plan for a <u>culminating event</u> :	Score 1 2 3
that includes the exhibition of <u>high quality work and writing</u> from each student,	
that provides opportunities for every student to <u>talk about his or her learning</u> with a significant adult,	
that includes a <u>narrative of the expedition</u> produced by students	
<u>Comments.</u>	

## APPENDIX H: MICHAEL'S WRITTEN NARRATIVE

### Gerald E. Talbot

Gerald E. Talbot was the first president of the NAACP in Portland, Maine, and the first African-American legislator in Maine. He has spent his life working for civil rights.

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*"Our first priority is to let our voices be heard."*

---

Gerald E. Talbot is a man with many accomplishments. He was born in Bangor, Maine, in 1931. He graduated from Bangor High School in 1952. Three years later he enlisted in the army. He would serve from 1953 to 1956. Mr. Talbot then fell in love with Anita Cummings, and they got married in 1954. They raised four daughters together. In 1966 he found a job with the Guy Gannett Publishing Company. He would have this job for a quarter of a century. The part Mr. Talbot played in the Civil Rights Movement in Portland has benefitted us all.

Gerald E. Talbot started to get interested in the NAACP in 1956. In 1964 it was time to elect a new President. Gerald had no idea that anyone would even think of electing him as President. When they announced that Gerald E. Talbot had won the election, he was astounded. After winning he announced, "Our first priority is to let our voices be heard." He then worked with the NAACP to focus on major problems.

During that time period, as the new President of the NAACP, he found himself with a sea of problems. He soon found out that a good way to bring attention to those problems was to hold local marches. Every time there was a big problem the NAACP would hold a march. The police were very much against these marches. They would say, "You can't hold any more marches." But Mr. Talbot and the rest of the NAACP found a way around it. You see, as long as they didn't disturb traffic they could hold as many marches as they wanted. Mr. Talbot commented, "By marching as one we became a voice." NAACPs in other areas took notice of Gerald and what he was doing in Portland. In

1968, the NAACP held the first New England Regional meeting. Other places like Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont came to march together. The march was a success, but there were still problems in Portland that needed to be looked at.

Fair housing was an ongoing problem. Blacks were not able to get good housing with space, quality, and at an affordable price. Mr. Talbot was among those people with troubles finding and keeping a house. Mr. Talbot is lighter skinned, and it was sometimes hard to tell if he was black or white. When Gerald E. Talbot went to find an apartment he would usually get it, but as Mr. Talbot talked to the landlord, the landlord would ask him to bring his wife over. Knowing that his wife was darker skinned than him, and it was clear that she was an African American woman, Mr. Talbot would get a tad bit scared. When he would bring his wife over, he would already know in his mind he would not get the rent. And he was right. As soon as the landlord saw his wife, Mrs. Anita Talbot, he would say, "Sorry, we don't have an available apartment for you." After the same thing happened over and over again, Gerald Talbot knew something needed to be done. He recalls that "fair housing was a major problem that needed immediate NAACP attention." In 1964, he joined the voter registration drive in Mississippi, and was a key figure in helping to pass Maine's 1966 'Fair Housing Bill.'

Mr. Talbot explained to us that despite these efforts, "discrimination has been around for hundreds of years." He said that "the most important type discrimination to try to stop is in education." Gerald

### *Small Acts of Courage*

Talbot told us that "education for blacks back then was a constant struggle." This was also a problem that the NAACP needed to work on. He commented with a very bold sound in his voice, "People will discriminate against you because they have a *I'm going to discriminate against you to make myself feel superior attitude.*" Gerald recounted a very good example of racism that he experienced. He remembers a time when he was working for his dad as a cook. The customers would always ask him "Hey you there. Are you Indian, white, black? What are you?" Then Mr. Talbot would say, "I'm an African American." After hearing that, their attitude would change completely. They would call him the "N" word. At this time other problems and conflicts were just heating up.

"Big problems were just getting bigger," Mr. Talbot commented. "I would look in the newspaper and see big headlines about the KKK saying they were coming to town. And the trouble didn't stop there." Gerald would constantly get calls from KKK saying that they were coming for him, and they would threaten him. Mr. Talbot remembered that when you would get pulled over by a policeman, you would get a ticket, and later on you would find out "that same policeman was a Klansmen." Also, if you got in enough trouble and had to go to court, eventually you would find out that the judge was a Klansmen." It was a normal evening when Gerald went to a mini mall where he saw Klansmen walking around the parking lot. Mr. Talbot was sick of the calls, the harassment, and the trouble, so he did something most African Americans were afraid to do. Mr. Talbot walked right up to a Klansmen and pulled his hood right off of his head. Another Klansmen came up to him and told him, "Hey you. You don't want trouble now do you?" Mr. Talbot recalls with a proud look, "I was never afraid of them, nor will I ever be."

We asked Mr. Talbot what events stand out most in his memory, and his eyes lit up and he said very proudly, "March on Washington." He remembers being at that very important day in our history. He remembers an ordinary 1963 afternoon. That afternoon, Gerald E. Talbot got a call from Rev. John Bruce, from Green Memorial AME Zion Church. He had no idea what the call was about. The Reverend called to ask Mr. Talbot if he wanted to attend the March on Washington. Gerald E. Talbot told the reverend, "Sure, but I have no

money. How will I get there?" The Reverend explained to Mr. Talbot that "this march is totally free, all you have to do is be willing to walk. Gerald E. Talbot was definitely on board because he thought that marches were a great way to be heard. When Mr. Talbot told his wife about the march, she wasn't as excited. She didn't have a problem with the march, but she was just concerned for husband's health. Mr. Talbot said, "I wasn't going to miss this important day that was going to go down in history." This was too big for him to pass up. He marched with his 'brothers and sisters' for miles and miles, and when the march came to an end and it was time for Dr. Luther King Jr. to speak on the

Lincoln Memorial steps. Mr. Talbot even remembers shedding a tear or two after that beautiful speech. Even after all of Gerald E. Talbot's successes, something was missing.



After all the work with the NAACP, Mr. Talbot felt like he needed to do something new. One day, an old friend came to him and told him, "You know, you should put your name in for running for Maine State Legislature." "Are you crazy?"

Mr. Talbot explained to him, "Who would vote for me?" Eventually Mr. Talbot ran for the Legislature, and to his delight he won. He was probably the most surprised of anyone. Gerald E. Talbot then had a term from 1972 to 1978.

Gerald E. Talbot continues to speak out strongly on issues surrounding Civil Rights. He comments, "Our mission is not over, discrimination is still a problem that needs to be addressed." It just goes to show you, you don't need to be a big publicized figure to change the world. One small act of courage at a time can do wonders.

## APPENDIX I: FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS' IN-SCHOOL REHEARSAL OF KEYNOTE

### Goods

Loud voices - Nice eye contact - Energy in voices - Emotion into voices - Clear voices - Confidence - Informational/good information - Well spoken - Good timing - Insightful - Being on time - Looking at the audience - Loud - Slow and easy to hear - Dramatic/touching - Good speed - Great pacing! - Very confident - Good personal connections - Nice idea to turn the pages for each other - Keep it up! - Great job! - Amazing presentation - I liked every part of the speech - Nice job guys, it was very interesting - Great job! You all spoke clearly and confidently - Smooth transitions - Great speech! - Good luck in Oregon! - Very good telling of the story - Good explanation of story - Good explanations - I especially liked the multilingual introduction and thank you - They showed that kids can make a difference - They showed how learning here can be fun and productive - Videos were great - Got to meet people who were in the movement - I like how they know when they're going to talk - Like the comedy - Great slices of humor added at the right moments - Like the opening/I like how they spoke in different languages - It was inspirational - I think what they did was good/that they can get up there and talk in front of us all - Good explaining about the expedition and history of King - Very touching! - It's great! - Great organization - Sounded and looked professional - Nice coordination between what is said and what is on the video/pictures - Great job!! - I liked the way the speakers made eye contact with the audience - I liked how they took their time - It really shows our process well - Clear that they put in a lot of hard work and time and that they practiced over and over again - I felt like I was in a professional presentation - The photography and video was brilliant - Good posture - I liked how the kids stood up behind the speaker before they spoke - I liked how the people who weren't speaking that they sat still and quietly - Intro was awesome - Diverse view points - The lead up to small acts of courage was perfect - Liked how you are legit - Nice job! - Nice ending

### Suggestions for Improvement

Stutters - Pauses between words/speak slower - Pausing too much/shorter pauses - Others don't look engaged/interested while someone else is talking - Need clearer voices - Work on pronunciation of some words - Accidental emphasis in some words, probably caused from anxiety - Smile more - Don't stress words - Speak louder - Kind of stiff - Talk more naturally - First reference to KKK-say Ku Klux Klan - When you introduce Rachel Talbot Ross, say 'daughter of Gerald Talbot' - Make sure microphone is at mouth level - Don't glorify interviewees 'cause it sounds fishy and false - Less fidgety - Don't let the audience get to you - Work on eye contact - Make the microphone more comfortable for you before speaking/keep it directly in front of your mouth - Soften 'p's so they don't 'POP' - I think they're looking down too much and that they should practice their lines a little bit - Cut waiting out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> video after you change to the 2<sup>nd</sup> mic - Sound for video could be louder - Stay on one mic - Memorize a little more so you don't look at the paper as much - Remember lines a little more - Learn lines to the point that they are comfortable - Work on body language - Have a happier face - Speak louder when saying words in another language - Turning the papers/script might only be at the end of each individual speaker - In the back of the room it was difficult to see some of the images - Background music was too loud - The MEA stats were too small - Come out of chair more professional